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Decolonizing Texts: A Performance Autoethnography

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DECOLONIZING TEXTS : A PERFORMANCE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

A Thesis Presented

by

HARI STEPHEN KUMAR

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

September 2011

COMMUNICATION

DECOLONIZING TEXTS : A PERFORMANCE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

A Thesis Presented

by

HARI STEPHEN KUMAR

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DEDICATION

For
Alexis.

For
Eliana.

For
Claudio.

For
All betweeners who
Make life livable
On this journey:
Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks be to God for breathing life into it all.

Thanks be to Alexis for breathing with me on this journey, with love and grace always.

Thanks be to Eliana for reminding me everyday to breathe—and reminding me why.

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Thanks be to Bryant Keith Alexander, for relentlessly inspiring me through visceral scholarship in performance autoethnography and through walking the talk in our embodied friendship.

Thanks be to friends and colleagues, co-journeyers on this crazy path between the personal and the professional, between lived experiences and the academy, between identities and cultural politics, betweeners breathing life into us all.

ABSTRACT

DECOLONIZING TEXTS : A PERFORMANCE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

SEPTEMBER 2011

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I write performance autoethnography as a methodological project committed to evoking embodied and lived experience in academic texts, using performance writing to decolonize academic knowledge production. Through a fragmented itinerary across continents and ethnicities, across religions and languages, across academic and vocational careers, I speak from the everyday spaces in between supposedly stable cultural identities involving race, ethnicity, class, gendered norms, to name a few. I write against colonizing practices which police the racist, sexist, and xenophobic cultural politics that produce and validate particular identities. I write from the intersections of my own living experiences within and against those cultural practices, and I bring these intersections with me into the academic spaces where I live and labor, intertwining the personal and the professional. Within the academy, colonizing structures manifest in ways that value disembodied and objectified Western knowledges about people, while excluding certain bodies and lived experiences from research texts. My thesis locates the academy as both a site for struggle and an arena for transformative work, turning from Others as objects of

study and toward decolonizing academic knowledge production, making Western epistemologies themselves the objects of inquiry (Smith 1999; Denzin 2003; Moreira 2009). Connecting with a tradition and community of scholars in the ‘seventh moment’ of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b), I disrupt acts of academic(s) writing as the textual labor most privileged in the academy. In this thesis I write messy acts of embodied knowledges (Weems 2003; Moreira 2007), including this abstract itself, while each act resists and breaks forms of ‘traditional’ academic writing to varying degrees, ranging from subtle to overtly transgressive. My ‘fieldwork’ invokes my 35 years of perpetual migration: observed through my messy and unvalidated perspectives, recorded and transcribed through my messy and unreliable body, distorted by my messy and deceptive memories, and experienced every single day in messy encounters out of my control, while I live and labor as a perpetual betweenner. I write visceral texts as performance acts that invite us all, as betweenners, to write and read from the flesh in order to turn our gaze toward decolonizing academic knowledge production.

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ACT I

INTRODUCTIONS

To live in the Borderlands means you
are neither *hispana india negra espanola*
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed
caught in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
not knowing which side to turn to, run from ...
~ Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/2007)

* * *

They came, they saw, they named, they claimed.
~ Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999)

* * *

We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the
white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't
know what he is missing. [...] The theory behind our tactics:
“The white man is always trying to know into somebody
else’s business. All right, I’ll set something outside the door
of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my
writing but he sho’ can’t read my mind. I’ll put this play toy
in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I’ll say
my say and sing my song.”
~ Zora Neale Hurston (1935/2008)

* * *

We are all collateral damage for someone’s beautiful
Ideology, all of us inanimate in the face of the onslaught. [...]
How would you like
To feel like a fucking storm every time someone looked
At *you*?
One time I was
At a party. Some guy asked me: *What are you, anyway?*
I downed my beer. *Mexican* I said. *Really* he said, *Do*
You play soccer? No I said *but I drink Tequila*. He smiled
At me, *That's cool*. I smiled back *So what are you?*
What do you think I am he said. *An asshole* I said. People
Hate you when you’re right.
~ Benjamin Alire Sáenz (2010)

The words of Gloria, Linda, Zora, and Benjamin echo many of the intersections of my own living experiences within and against cultural practices and social structures. It is from within those intersections that I write my performance autoethnographies in this thesis—in doing so, I bring those intersections with me into the academic spaces where I currently live and labor. Indeed, my goal in writing this thesis is to decolonize academic structures that separate personal and professional life. I write from the spaces that are in-between supposedly stable cultural identities in order to challenge the colonizing structures that produce knowledges to continually stabilize and reify those identities. Within the academy, those colonizing structures manifest in ways that value Western knowledges about Others, especially marginalized and oppressed Others, while excluding the bodies and lived experiences of those others from the texts that are produced about them. Therefore, my thesis locates the academy as both a site for struggle and an arena for transformative work in shifting the gaze away from Others as objects of study and toward the structures of knowledge production that shield Western epistemologies from themselves becoming objects of inquiry (Smith, 1999; Denzin, 2003; Denzin, 2005; Swadener & Mutua, 2008; Moreira, 2009). The primary focus for my thesis, then, is the act of writing as the textual labor most valued in the academy. I write performance autoethnography as a methodological project committed to evoking embodied and lived experience in academic texts, using performance writing to destabilize and decolonize Western structures of knowledge production in the academy.

I want to introduce you to an embodied difference experienced by D. Soyini Madison, an African-American scholar of performance studies, who writes about a transformative encounter in Ghana. On her way to visit a friend named Lisa, also an

African-American scholar doing research in Ghana, Madison finds herself in the lobby of an apartment building but uncertain whether her friend lives there. A Ghanaian man asks her, “Are you looking for the white girl upstairs?” Madison writes:

I was taken aback by his description. Lisa is honey brown, with natural hair and West African-inspired clothing, and blackness of tongue. How could he mistake Lisa for a white woman!

“No,” I said, unsettled and insulted. “I am not looking for a white girl, I am looking for Lisa Aubrey, and we are both African Americans.” The man pointed to her apartment and then just shook his head and chuckled under his breath, “Abruni.” I trembled. He had just called me a foreigner, a white person. (Madison, 2010, p. 161)

With this scene, Madison begins a paragraph that stretches uninterrupted for almost three whole pages, in which she provides an intense account weaving personal narrative with larger sociocultural analyses of race, geography, globalization, and culture. The moment becomes an epiphany for her, in ways that Norman Denzin (2003) describes as “ritually structured liminal experiences connected to moments of breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration or schism, crossing from one space to another ... strange and familiar situations that connect critical biographical experiences (epiphanies) with culture, history, and social structure” (p. 34). Madison (2010) reflects that we “are reminded repeatedly (and for good reason) that race is constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed depending on locale, history, and power, but immediate experience sometimes penetrates deeper” (p. 163).

Madison’s experience of that one moment where she is interpellated by the Ghanaian man as a ‘white woman’ shocks her because she identifies so strongly with Ghana both as an African-American woman and as a black woman who claims Ghana as home just as much as America is also home for her. In the moment that she describes

above, I found a deep resonance because I too have been similarly interpellated in my own experiences living in America as an immigrant from India, via a troubled childhood in Yemen. Indeed, as a perpetual global nomad for the first couple of decades of my life, my formative identities are a blur of race, geography, religion, and language. Trying to live in New England as an alien-becoming-a-citizen, I readily identify with several of Madison's epiphanies regarding the politics of representation and identification. But what if Madison did not have the luxury of returning 'home' to America from her 'home' in Ghana? What if Madison was in Ghana not to do fieldwork for her research projects back in America, but what if she was in Ghana with the purpose of staying there indefinitely? Would her fieldwork in Ghana be just as intense, if not more? Would such revelatory and everyday experiences be counted as fieldwork without the benefit of fieldnotes or recorded transcripts? Would it still be research?

As John Clarke and Stuart Hall and others have written, individual biographies "cut paths in and through the determined spaces of the structures and cultures in which individuals are located" (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 1975/1993, p. 57). I seek to perform autoethnography as scholarship that cuts paths through and beyond articulations between selves and societies, in order to decolonize my experiences of living with my body as the site for multiple claims in between colonizing structures:

- In 1976 I was Hariharan Shivakumar; in 2006 I changed my name to hari stephen kumar.
- I was born in South India; I spent my childhood in North Yemen; and I am now becoming an American citizen after fourteen winters in New England.
- I was schooled in mathematics and the physical sciences; I trained to be an engineer and worked as an engineer for a decade; I am now a scholar in the humanities and social sciences.

- I was born to a Brahmin Hindu father and a Nair Hindu mother; they raised me as a Hindu Brahmin in a Sunni Muslim country; I am now a Protestant Christian in a liberal denomination.
- My parents speak Tamil; I spoke Arabic as a child; I now claim English as my first language.

None of these are stationary biographical statements: as fragmented representations of a migrant scholar's past and present itinerary, each of them strives to cut through and beyond colonizing spaces, but in indeterminate and contingent ways. As Bryant Keith Alexander (1999) says, "we all exist between the lines of our narrated lives, the stories we tell and the stories that are told about us" (p. 310). These fragmented statements hint at the stories that might emerge from gaps and borders, echoing Della Pollock (1999):

But what happens when a story begins in absence? When it takes its momentum from a gap, a break, a border space, or element of difference that violates laws of repetition and re-presentation even in the act of repeating, retelling, representing [itself]? What happens when "the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing*"? (p. 27, emphasis in original referencing a quote from Homi Bhabha)

Performance autoethnography provides ways for writing and narrating lived practices from within such gaps, against and beyond social structures that rigorously police the boundaries of various racist, sexist, and xenophobic cultural politics.

Taking my momentum from Madison's epiphany, I position my stories as narratives of fieldwork where the 'field' is my own life as lived in perpetual transition and transnational migration for the past thirty-odd years. As an immigrant in America, I must wrestle both with my own itineraries and the itineraries that are ascribed to me—especially as a brown and bearded immigrant, with significant past history as a child growing up in the Middle East, in a violently Islamophobic American political climate. When I came back to graduate school after a career in engineering, one of the first things I noticed while reading about ethnography was how often the writers of ethnographies

framed their experiences as a disorienting journey away from the familiar and into the strange. I found myself murmuring under my breath, “yeah right, welcome to my life,” with each account of the difficulties of ‘leaving home’ to ‘enter the field’. I realized that these ethnographies deployed writing strategies designed to resonate with a particular audience assumed to be white middle-class academics in Western research institutions—but I wondered about the assumptions in these strategies of framing a fixed and familiar ‘home’ juxtaposed with a strange but just as fixed ‘field’. Most of the ethnographies I initially read in graduate school, as required readings, located the ‘field’ conveniently far away geographically from ‘home’, such as a South Pacific island or an African village. However, even ethnographies that located the ‘field’ closer to ‘home’ framed the ‘field’ as distant—such as Native American tribes on reservations near-but-so-far from urban centers, or urban youth cultures just around the corner from university campuses.

After a while I became intensely suspicious of ‘fieldwork’ as a metaphor for ethnographic work. I murmured even when reading Dwight Conquergood (1992):

Ethnographers resemble trickster performers and wily sophists especially when they return from foreign worlds with Other knowledge and use it to disconcert established premises and play with reality at home. (p. 81)

Such a framework assumes a stable ‘reality at home’ to begin with, and an ethnographer who sets out from that ‘home’ duly authorized and commissioned by the ‘established premises’ to go produce knowledge about the Other. But what if the Other shows up ‘here’ instead, walking into academic hallways and disrupting academic knowledges with Other productions of knowledge? The root of my discontent with ‘fieldwork’ as a metaphor for ethnographic work is the ways that it paints ‘fieldwork’ as an experience of living that is very different from how one lives when one is ‘home’. Fieldwork is

somehow constructed to be much more rigorous than everyday life ‘back home’, even if experiences of ‘home’ in many ethnographies consists of working and writing within the dusty corridors of academic buildings. What about those for whom life in the field is not something they can leave to come back home? What if one approached life back home with the same supposed rigor of life in the field? When I asked this question as a student in a graduate anthropology course (shortly before the birth of my daughter), the professor remarked with kindly and friendly concern:

Actually, I would venture to say that most ethnographers eat, sleep and breathe fieldwork when they are “in the field.” Done well, I would argue, it is an incredibly exhausting enterprise. Why would you want to take that on? It seems only someone truly privileged (and not a father of a newborn) would be able to take on such a thing! I hate to think what it will do to your home life. Proceed with caution. You may need some boundaries!
(BK, personal communication)

Such a prospect seems truly frightening to researchers trained (and perhaps privileged) in the ‘fieldwork’ model of ethnography. And yet that is precisely the view that I propose.

My life is one large and messy collection of fieldnotes, observed and experienced by my messy and decidedly opinionated perspectives, recorded and transcribed through my messy and unreliable body, stored and distorted in my messy and deceptive memories, and experienced every single day in disruptive moments out of my control, whether I want to or not, whether I consider it a privilege or a burden, as the “incredibly exhausting enterprise” of living and working in strange cultural situations as a perpetual alien. I resonate with Kagendo Mutua’s goals and motivations for a decolonizing project of writing to disturb traditionally stable narratives:

I share snippets of my decolonizing journey to highlight the presence/disturbance of a number of discourses that have shaped my colonial and postcolonial lives [...] I am required for no other

reason other than being alien/postcolonial to explain what I am doing in the United States. I find that the hypocrisy engendered in the collective amnesia of non-Native Americans, who all have an immigrant history yet make the proximity of my advent into the United States to be of consequence, is morbidly interesting. I bring with me cultural differences that make difficult the lives of those who have to deal with me or the lives of those who arrived here before me. (Swadener & Mutua, 2008, p. 37)

Sharing with Mutua the fleeting solidarity of indigenous affiliation as immigrants, I write invitations to a world of lived experiences. In an academic context, this thesis involves methodologies which collide with other forms of knowledge production that are too frequently impositional instead of invitational. Rather, drawing from Madison (2010), “I personalize my experiences in the field to engage ironically with a vulnerability toward universal questions and human unease. Race as personally experienced in the ethnographic then, when I became subject and object of the Other’s gaze, brings me to the ethnographic now, writing. I theorize from the starting point of the personal and from my own racial dislocation between, within, and outside belonging” (p. 163).

As a person living a fragmented itinerary across nations and continents, across religions and languages, across ethnicities and nationalities, across academic and vocational career paths, I speak from the concrete everyday spaces in between abstract categories of ‘knowledge’ about identity. My thesis involves writing as a betweenner, from those in between spaces, to bring forth the visceral knowledge that our bodies rely on for everyday survival. As Marcelo Diversi and Claudio Moreira (2009) express:

We are all betweeners
Us, betweeners
Them, betweeners
You, betweenner

EveryBody, betweenner
Writing from the flesh

Exposing the vulnerability and power
Of our branded bodies
Making visceral knowledge count ...
(p. 223)

Therefore, I write visceral and embodied texts as performance acts that invite us as betweeners to write and read from the flesh, in order to turn our gaze toward questioning the structures of knowledge production in the Western academy.

This thesis is organized as a series of messy and layered acts, borrowing from the work of Mary E. Weems (2003) and Claudio Moreira (2007), where even this introductory chapter can be seen as a stand-alone performance text. Each of these acts shows varying degrees of resistance and breakage with forms of academic writing, even as some are more theoretical than others and some are more overtly performative than others. Immediately following this introductory act, I develop the theoretical and methodological frameworks that shape the whole thesis. These frameworks are located primarily in a tradition of qualitative research that Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2005b) call the ‘seventh moment’, a tradition that I describe in detail. Specifically, I develop particular connections between three interrelated projects in the ‘seventh moment’: decolonizing knowledge production, performance autoethnography (with a particular focus on a performative cultural politics), and performance writing. Following these connections, the rest of the thesis is composed of five interconnected acts:

- *Act III: speaking in silences*

This act features a series of encounters where I re-imagine and re-perform possible responses to actual conversations from my lived experience where my identity was (mis)constructed through fluid intersections of race, religion, language and nationality.

- ***Act IV: stranger at the gate***

This act features a collage of quotes from scholars arguing with each other regarding major paradigm shifts in performance studies during the 1990s. My own voice is deliberately absent in this act but reading this act involves experiencing texts through my eyes—these quotes are interspliced with(in) each other, across time and space, to create a polyvocal and layered text that evokes my own experiences reading these words as a graduate student learning the field, as a stranger at the gate experiencing glimpses of a fractious academic landscape. The quotes do not have any in-text citations (although a scriptural map is provided at the end of the act).

- ***Act V: performing english***

This act challenges the concept of a stable “first language” or “mother tongue” based on geography or national origin. Through a sequence of scenes from my memories of the colonizing influence of multiple languages on my family, I simultaneously disrupt the stability of English as a first(world) language while claiming it as my own first language.

- ***Act VI: betraying performance***

This act takes the form of an academic essay but challenges the illusory ‘safe’ and celebratory aspects of metaphors for performance studies. Rather, I connect Dwight Conquergood’s ‘nomadic’ caravan metaphor (1998) to my own lived experiences as a nomadic citizen (Joseph, 1999) to suggest an uncertain and troubled terrain.

- *Act VII: letters for eliana*

This act juxtaposes three different letters I wrote for my now one-year-old daughter Eliana. These letters trouble static notions of ‘home’ and ‘from-ness’, as in being asked where one is from, to question the connections between geography and destiny. These are connections that Soyini Madison troubles in her own encounter in Ghana, an insight that occurs to her when she hears the Ghanaian man ask her if she’s looking for ‘the white girl upstairs’. Madison’s subsequent reflections lead her to wonder whether “geography is destiny after all” (2010, p. 162). Since my introduction begins with that encounter, I also close my thesis with that moment. If Madison’s epiphany provided the momentum to begin my thesis, to begin my argument for the inclusion of visceral and embodied knowledges in the academy, I end my thesis returning to that moment of epiphany as the centerpiece for a performance text involving my relationship with my daughter Eliana. Using photography and poetry, I intertwine letters for Eliana with my own meditations on Soyini Madison’s insightful questioning of geography and destiny, meditations that arise unprovoked from moments of rupture and epiphany in our daily life as a multiracial family striving to live and labor in supposedly postcolonial New England. Therefore, as a preview of my own future research/life exploring the implications of embodied knowledges in the academy, these letters serve as the conclusion to my thesis.

ACT II

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this act I detail the theoretical and methodological frameworks that situate my thesis within the broad field of qualitative inquiry. First, I provide a broad overview of the particular areas of qualitative research that are primarily relevant for my thesis, using a taxonomy that Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln call the ‘moments’ of qualitative research. Next, within their set of ‘moments’, I highlight and detail the ‘seventh moment’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b) as one specific tradition of qualitative research that I connect with. This tradition significantly shapes the intellectual community of scholars that I identify with and among whom I claim membership. Thus, my thesis shares several aspects with other qualitative work in the ‘seventh moment’, including a sense of methodological contestation and a focus on decolonizing structures of academic knowledge production through embodied and written acts of performance scholarship. In particular, I describe three particular trajectories of research within the tradition of ‘seventh moment’ work that intersect for my thesis: (a) decolonizing knowledge production; (b) performance autoethnography for a performative cultural politics; and (c) performance writing as embodied scholarship. These three braids all intersect within the academy as both a site for struggle and a transformative arena for critical acts of scholarship. Therefore, in the concluding section of this act I outline how I draw from these three braids to shape my entire thesis, including this act itself.

Moments of Qualitative Research

Yvonna Lincoln and Norman Denzin use ‘moments’ as a way of characterizing different historical conjunctures in the field of qualitative research. While acknowledging that their taxonomy may be somewhat arbitrary and subject to objections about their “historicizing, or punctuating, moments in the awakening or creation of qualitative research” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1116), they reiterate that:

[...] there are genuine ruptures in the fabric of our own histories, precise or fuzzy points at which we are irrevocably changed. A sentence, a luminous argument, a compelling paper, a personal incident—any of these can create a breach between what we practiced previously and what we can no longer practice, what we believed about the world and what we can no longer hold onto, who we will be as field-workers as distinct from who we have been in earlier research. (p. 1116)

They provisionally delineate some nine such moments and predict more that are emerging in the present, while stressing that their organization is not to be read in a formalist manner and while emphasizing that the numbering and sequencing of their nine moments should not imply a progress narrative. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005b) remark: “each of the earlier historical moments is still operating in the present, either as legacy or as a set of practices that researchers continue [to] follow or argue against” (p. 20).

Furthermore, Lincoln and Denzin (2005) clarify that:

[...] many “moments”—in the form of real practitioners facing real problems in real fields and bringing with them real and material practices—will continue to circulate at the same time. Thus practitioners, scholars, and researchers are spread out, to varying degrees, over nine moments, often moving between moments as they seek—or are found by—new sites for inquiry. [...] we believe [this] adds to the strength of qualitative research as a field and discipline, for it signifies that practitioners are willing to live with many forms of practice, many paradigms, without demanding conformity or orthodoxy. (p. 1116-1117)

The ‘moments’ they describe can be summarized in the following list:

- **First moment:** Traditional period (early 1900s to World War II and into today).
- **Second moment:** Modernist phase (postwar years to 1970s and into today).
- **Third moment:** Blurred genres (1970-1986 and into today).
- **Fourth moment:** Triple crisis of representation (mid-1980s and into today).
- **Fifth moment:** Postmodern experimental writing (mid-1980s and into today).
- **Sixth moment:** Postexperimental inquiry (1995-2000 and into today).
- **Seventh moment:** Methodologically contested present (2000-2004 and today).
- **Eighth moment:** Methodological backlash (2005-present).
- **Ninth moment:** The fractured future (present onward).

Thus, by locating my work within the seventh of their list of around nine separate moments, I am connecting with a collection of traditions, practices and theoretical perspectives that has a distinct scope and purpose within the field of qualitative research while also maintaining an inclusive and invitational stance toward other traditions that have overlapping areas of alignment. Before describing the paradigms and practices of the seventh moment in more detail, I first contextualize the other moments.

First Moment: Traditional Period

The traditional period, from early 1900s to World War II, is a period when researchers “wrote ‘objective,’ colonizing accounts of field experiences that were reflective of the positivist scientist paradigm. They were concerned with offering valid, reliable, and objective interpretations in their writings. The ‘Other’ whom they studied was alien, foreign, and strange” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b, p. 15). This is a period often

hailed as ‘classic ethnography,’ featuring the work of Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and others. This is also a period that Renato Rosaldo describes as the period of the Lone Ethnographer.

Second Moment: Modernist Phase

The modernist phase, from the postwar years to the 1970s, is a moment that builds on the canonical and classical ethnographies of the traditional period in order to “formalize qualitative methods” through “rigorous qualitative studies of important social processes, including deviance and social control in the classroom and society” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b, p. 16). This is a period of “creative ferment” where researchers engage a variety of new theories such as “ethnomethodology, phenomenology, critical theory, feminism” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b, p. 16) and others. Paradigmatically, this period shifts from positivism to post-positivism. If the traditional period is often termed a time of ‘classical ethnography,’ Denzin and Lincoln remark that the modernist phase is often called the “golden age of rigorous qualitative analysis” (2005b, p. 17).

Third Moment: Blurred Genres

The period of blurred genres, which Denzin and Lincoln delineate as featuring prominently in 1970-1986 and continues today. This is a period when researchers employed a wide plethora of theories, paradigms, methods, and strategies, while also engaging seriously in questioning the politics and ethics of qualitative research. This is a period that featured a blurring of the boundaries between social sciences and the humanities, as described by Clifford Geertz and others writing during and about that

timeframe. As Denzin and Lincoln remark, during this period a “genre diaspora” occurs that produces “documentaries that read like fiction (Mailer), parables posing as ethnographies (Castañeda), theoretical treatises that look like travelogues (Lévi-Strauss)” and so on (2005b, p. 18).

Fourth Moment: Triple Crisis of Representation

This is a period marked by what many have called the “crisis of representation,” occurring in the mid-1980s. Denzin and Lincoln point to the publication of works such as *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* in 1986 by Marcus and Fischer, *Writing Culture* by Clifford and Marcus also in 1986, *Works and Lives* by Clifford Geertz in 1988, and several others as marking a call toward research and writing that is “more reflexive and [calls] into question the issues of gender, class, and race” (2005b, p. 18). This is a period when qualitative researchers “sought new models of truth, method, and representation” and eroded some of the “classic norms” of anthropological research, such as “objectivism, complicity with colonialism, social life structured by fixed rituals and customs, ethnographies as monuments to a culture” (2005b, p. 18) and others. During this crisis, according to Denzin and Lincoln, issues of “validity, reliability, and objectivity, previously believed settled, were once more problematic” (2005b, p. 18). Denzin and Lincoln assert that this period has produced an on-going “triple crisis of representation, legitimation, and praxis [that] confronts qualitative researchers” (2005b, p. 19). In many ways, the response of researchers to this triple crisis produces and continues to influence subsequent ‘moments’ of qualitative research.

Fifth Moment: Postmodern Experimental Writing

The postmodern period of experimental ethnographic writing emerged as one response to the triple crisis. Researchers in this ‘moment’ explore new ways of writing ethnography, read theories as “tales from the field” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b, p. 20), and wrestle with new concerns about representing the ‘Other.’ Denzin and Lincoln (2005b) characterize this moment as a time when “epistemologies from previously silenced groups emerged to offer solutions to these [representational] problems” and when the “concept of the aloof observer was abandoned” (p. 20). Researchers in this moment shift away from searching for grand narratives and instead seek “local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and specific situations” (p. 20).

Sixth Moment: Postexperimental Inquiry

The postexperimental inquiry moment can be seen as a continuation of the fifth moment but with a focus on shaping the experimental explorations in the fifth moment toward specific avenues for social inquiry. In some ways (although not exclusively), this ‘moment’ can be seen as engaging the representational breakthroughs of the ‘fifth moment’ toward concretely responding to the legitimation aspect of the triple crisis. The postexperimental inquiry period features active generation of new publications and research reports that “experiment with novel forms of expressing lived experience, including literary, poetic, autobiographical, multivoiced, conversational, critical, visual, performative and co-constructed representations” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b, p. 20).

Seventh Moment: Methodologically Contested Present

The sixth moment frames the emergence of the seventh moment, the period that Denzin and Lincoln (2005b) call the “methodologically contested present” (p. 20). This is a period of methodologies that organize themselves beyond experimental or postexperimental lines along the intersections of the critical turn, the performance turn, the rhetorical turn, the pedagogical turn, and the feminist turn in the social sciences and the humanities. Researchers in the seventh moment deploy a focused set of methodologies that draw from each of these turns and paradigm shifts, often using breakthroughs in representation and legitimation even as they are developing in the ‘fifth’ and ‘sixth’ moments. As such, the seventh moment is a moment of methodological sophistication and debate between paradigms, but it is a debate that coheres multiple paradigms together as joint responses to the praxis aspect of the triple crisis. This is not to say that neither the fifth or sixth moments engage praxis (they rigorously do), but praxis is a central concern in the seventh moment, especially against institutionalized knowledges that reject ‘nontraditional’ scholarship. That is, in the ‘seventh moment’, methodologies are debated not to refine their sophistication against each other but to engage in praxis against disciplinary boundaries and institutional powers as part of a broad critical cultural politics.

Eighth Moment: Methodological Backlash

Denzin and Lincoln describe this moment as a moment of methodological backlash, when qualitative researchers respond to the pushbacks from a resurgence of evidence-based counter-critiques and challenges to the ‘qualitative’ nature of qualitative

research. At the time that Denzin and Lincoln write, in 2005, this is a moment that is just emerging. Lincoln and Denzin (2005) identify four major issues that are central to the debates that orient this moment's practices: "the reconnection of social science to social purpose, the rise of indigenous social science(s) crafted for the local needs of indigenous peoples, the decolonization of the academy, and the return 'home' of Western social scientists as they work in their own settings using approaches that are vastly different from those employed by their predecessors" (p. 1117).

Ninth Moment: Fractured Future

The *fractured future* is a period that Lincoln and Denzin predict will emerge in the near future—perhaps even now—as a period of "serious moral confrontation in Western social science" (p. 1122). This is a period when the various responses to the triple crisis of the 1980s now begin to collide with repercussions that go beyond "mild-mannered disagreement between research methodologists, leading to a courteous détente between schools of thought [to] a firefight, with substantial resources, including funding through grants and contracts, and political and policy power hanging in the balance" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, pp. 1122). The resulting pressures mark this moment with a profound fracture that aligns qualitative research methodologists "on two opposing sides of a great divide," with, on one side, "randomized field trials, touted as the 'gold standard' of scientific educational research," and on the other, "a socially and culturally responsive, communitarian, justice-oriented set of studies" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1123). In such a moment, Lincoln and Denzin are pessimistic: "a world in which both

sides might be heard ... now seems somewhat far away, mixed-methods advocates notwithstanding” (2005, p. 1123).

The Seventh Moment of Qualitative Research

Given this summary, the tradition of the seventh moment provides an orienting set of practices and theoretical stances within which I locate my work and from which I draw particular threads in order to weave the theoretical/methodological framework for this thesis. Locating my work within the tradition of the seventh moment aligns me with particular projects and processes that make my work take on a tone and direction that is very distinct from how it would be if I located myself, say, within the traditions of the eighth or the sixth moments. The key characteristics of the seventh moment are: (a) methodological sophistication in postmodern and poststructural complexity; (b) boundary issues and paradigmatic tensions; (c) constant struggle and praxis toward a critical cultural politics; (d) decolonization of the academy; and (e) exploration of the invisible aspects of a transient global society. Many of these overlap and appear in other moments, such as decolonization of the academy (which significantly shapes the eighth moment) or exploration of the invisible (one of the key aspects from the postexperimental inquiry projects of the sixth moment), but they have distinct emphases that collectively shape the seventh moment’s overall distinction as a site for methodological contestation. I now proceed to describe this seventh moment in more detail before highlighting its implications for my work.

Denzin and Lincoln characterize the seventh moment as a moment of methodological sophistication. That is, it is distinct from, say, the sixth moment in that

the methodologies engaged in the seventh moment no longer consider themselves to be experimental or postexperimental. With a “growing body of literature on specific methods, theoretical lenses, and paradigms ... a mature sophistication now characterizes the choices that qualitative researchers, practitioners, and theoreticians deploy in inquiring into social issues” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1115). The sophistication emphasizes a degree of complexity that defies easy categorization and stresses a commitment to sustained scholarship in multiple fields:

No longer is it possible to categorize practitioners of various perspectives, interpretive practices, or paradigms in a singular or simplistic way. The old categories have fallen away with the rise of conjugated and complex new perspectives. Poststructuralist feminist qualitative researchers are joined by critical indigenous qualitative researchers. Critical poststructural feminist reconstructionists work in tandem with postmodern performance ethnographers. Labels perform double duty, or they are not applied at all. (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1115)

The sophistication arises from the depth of scholarship that comes together across multiple conjunctions and turns: feminism, postmodern and poststructural perspectives, the rhetorical turn and the performance turn, the critical turn and/with the pedagogical turn, “and the turn toward a rising tide of *voices*. These are the voices of the formerly disenfranchised, the voices of subalterns everywhere, the voices of indigenous and postcolonial peoples, who are profoundly politically committed to determining their own destiny” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, pp. 1115-1116). That is, the theoretical stances in the seventh moment are of a particular complexity and sophistication that requires a commitment both toward paradigmatic tensions and toward constant political struggle in critical cultural praxis.

The paradigmatic tensions in the seventh moment arise from the confluence of multiple methodologies and paradigms within the moment. As with many moments, the seventh moment does not claim to exclusively represent any one particular methodology, but is a coalition of various methodologies oriented toward similar purposes. What marks the seventh moment is a commitment to channel the inherent paradigmatic tensions toward revisioning the divisions between disciplines in order to change material realities. The contestation between paradigms in the seventh moment is not so much about blurring boundaries between disciplines as it is about significantly reshaping disciplines. Such a stance necessarily involves significant tensions even “*within* the qualitative research community, simply because the methodological, paradigmatic, perspectival, and inquiry contexts are so open and varied that it is easy to believe that researchers are everywhere” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1116). Even so, the particular paradigmatic tensions involved in the seventh moment share a commitment against “modernist master narratives” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1122) that shapes the contestation between paradigms within the seventh moment in specific ways oriented toward a critical cultural politics.

Lincoln and Denzin mark the seventh moment as a site for “great tension, substantial conflict, methodological retrenchment in some quarters” (2005, p. 1116) especially around methodologies that call for significant and material social changes in structures of state and institutional power. While the paradigmatic tensions outlined in the previous paragraph lead to struggle within the field of work happening in the seventh moment, Denzin and Lincoln emphasize the significance of critical cultural politics in the struggle of qualitative methodologies in the seventh moment against attacks along three

dimensions: the political, the epistemological, and the ethical. On the political dimension they identify “methodological conservatives who are connected to neoconservative governmental regimes [who] support evidence-based, experimental methodologies or mixed methods” but do so in a way that “consigns qualitative research to the methodological margins” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 1083). On the epistemological dimension they identify “neotraditionalist methodologists who look with nostalgia at the Golden Age of qualitative inquiry” and who “find in the past all that is needed for inquiry in the present” (p. 1083). On the ethical dimension they identify “mainstream biomedical scientists and traditional social science researchers who invoke a single ethical model for human subject research” (p. 1083). Denzin and Lincoln (2005a) suggest that the critics along these dimensions “do not recognize the influences of indigenous, feminist, race, queer, and ethnic border studies” (p. 1083). Against these pressures, research in the seventh moment is marked by a sustained critical cultural politics involving participants who are “committed to politically informed action research, inquiry directed to praxis and social change” and who “seek a set of disciplined interpretive practices that will produce radical democratizing transformations in the public and private spheres of the global postcapitalist world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 1084). One of the key aspects of this cultural and political struggle involves the decolonization of the academy, especially as the “desire for critical, multivoiced, postcolonial ethnographies increases as capitalism extends its global reach” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 1084).

The methodological contestation in the seventh moment particularly involves the academy both as a site for struggle and as an arena for transformative work. Research work in the seventh moment occurs in ways that politically and culturally decolonize the

institutional power of the academy. Lincoln and Denzin (2005) emphasize the significant influence of both faculty and students in this process of decolonizing the academy. They describe the pivotal role of:

new faculty members [who] are far less wedded to traditional forms of academic reporting [than] their predecessors, [changing] the very shapes and forms of texts—whether books, journal articles, or conference presentations [...] students of these new faculty tend to be equally comfortable with experimentation [...] increasingly preparing research papers and dissertations that are, at a minimum, bilingual—writings that address the needs of multiple rather than singular audiences, often across national borders [...] deploy[ing] this kind of strategy deliberately, with a globalized impact in mind. (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1121)

As a result, “experimental, ‘messy,’ layered poetic and performance texts are beginning to appear in journals and on conference podiums” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1121).

While many of these decolonization processes peak in the eighth moment, much of the work in the seventh moment involves several decolonizing strategies and tactics. Such moves often involve significant contributions from the sixth moment’s experimental modes of inquiry which, in the seventh moment, begin to be deployed as established methods for researching the invisible spaces in a transient global society.

Given the critical cultural politics of struggle and contestation that mark the seventh moment, a key research focus in the seventh moment involves the lived experiences of marginalized groups in a world of rampant capitalist globalization and exploitation. Recognizing the invisibility of such groups in an increasingly transient and mobile global society, research in the seventh moment is characterized by a plethora of methods that at first seem chaotic and fragmented. However, as Lincoln and Denzin point out, such chaos and fragmentation reflects

the intense desire of a growing number of people to explore the multiple unexplored places of a global society in transition. But where these people study, what they study, with whom they study, how they study the phenomena of interest with a communitarian sensibility, what they write about what they have studied, who writes about what they have studied—all these are subject to debate and struggle. (2005, p. 1116)

Denzin and Lincoln (2005a) suggest “performance-based cultural studies and critical theory perspectives” provide a better approach to such unexplored spaces than the “traditional empiricist foundations of qualitative research” (p. 1087). Connecting with postmodern and poststructural approaches, they emphasize “a new body of ethical directives” because:

The old ethical codes failed to examine research as a morally engaged project. They never seriously located the researcher within the ruling apparatuses of society. A feminist, communitarian ethical system will continue to evolve, informed at every step by critical race, postcolonial, and queer theory sensibilities. Blatant voyeurism in the name of science or the state will continue to be challenged. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 1087)

Such a stance shifts research away from complicity with what Dwight Conquergood called the “ocular politics” (1998, p. 30) of repressive state regimes and instead orients the researcher toward a non-surveillance mode of understanding lived experiences through performance and solidarity with nomadic and marginalized groups. Norman Denzin (2003) references Trinh T. Minh-Ha’s documentary work on Vietnamese women as an example of research that “question[s] the very notion of a stable, unbiased gaze ... makes the interviewer’s gaze visible [and] also disrupts the spectator’s gaze” (p. 75).

The combination of these five characteristics of research in the seventh moment (i.e. the methodological complexity, the paradigmatic fluidity, the struggle of critical cultural politics, the decolonization of the academy, and the exploration of invisible

transient spaces) produce a complex and shifting set of requirements for research methodologies. The pressures and purposes of the seventh moment, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005a) describe it, requires a researcher who:

thinks historically and interactionally, always mindful of the structural processes that make race, gender, and class potentially repressive presences in daily life. The material practices of qualitative inquiry turn the researcher into a methodological (and epistemological) *bricoleur*. This person is an artist, a quilt maker, a skilled craftsperson, a maker of montages and collages. The interpretive bricoleur can interview, observe, study material culture, think within and beyond visual methods, write poetry or fiction, write autoethnography, construct narratives that tell explanatory stories, use qualitative computer software, do text-based inquiries, construct *testimonios* using focus group interviews, and even engage in applied ethnography and policy formulation. (p. 1084)

Such is the kind of work that I engage in my thesis, situated within the particular context of the seventh moment and engaging in particular dimensions of the critical cultural projects involved in that context. Specifically, I intertwine three different braids of work from within the seventh moment into my thesis: (a) decolonizing knowledge production; (b) performance autoethnography for a performative cultural politics; and (c) performance writing as visceral scholarship. In the next three sections, I detail how these braids intersect within the academy both as a site for struggle and an arena for transformative work.

Decolonizing Knowledge Production

The project of decolonizing knowledge production has a long contextual trajectory arising from several dimensions of postcolonial scholarship and critical struggles against the colonial past of Western research. In this section, I provide a brief

overview of the terms ‘colonization’ and ‘colonizer/colonized’ especially as they involve the Western academy in projects of global knowledge production. Locating my work primarily as a decolonizing project, I detail particular connections between decolonizing methodologies and qualitative research in the seventh moment.

As outlined previously, research methodologies in earlier moments of qualitative research were significantly implicated in Western projects of imperialism and colonialism. Such methodologies often involved research into non-Western peoples for the purpose of furthering and reifying Western imperial ambitions on a global scale. One particular way that such research methodologies tied into colonial projects was through their approaches to constructing knowledge acquired about the ‘Other’, that is, about the non-Western peoples that European forces encountered in their colonizing projects. Such approaches operated from both a Euro-centric and an imperially-driven collection of epistemologies and ontologies regarding the nature of ‘knowledge’ in that they aimed to capture and extract knowledge about other cultures while simultaneously subjugating those cultures under European rule. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Smith, 1999) describes the connections between European imperialism and knowledge production as follows:

The collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized. (pp. 1-2)

The colonizing impetus of much Western scholarship arises from an unacknowledged dominance of Western and Euro-centric epistemologies when it comes to continuing similar practices with regard to producing knowledge.

A paradigm of ‘collection, classification, analysis, and representation’ reigns, imperially, within Western academic discourse utilizing primarily the perspectives and languages of Western eyes and voices, for Western audiences. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) describe how this paradigm operates in colonizing ways as follows:

Sadly, qualitative research in many, if not all, of its forms (observation, participation, interviewing, ethnography) serves as a metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth. The metaphor works this way: Research, quantitative and qualitative is scientific. Research provides the foundation for reports about and representations of the other. In the colonial context, research becomes an objective way of representing the dark-skinned other to the White world. (p. 4)

Considering the impact of such research practices on indigenous communities, Smith writes:

It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations. (1999, p. 1)

As a result, especially among indigenous communities worldwide, the word itself, ‘research’, “is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s dictionary” (Smith, 1999, p. 1).

Against the colonizing impetus of Western academic research, a number of research methodologies have arisen that have an explicitly decolonizing approach to knowledge construction. Smith describes ‘decolonizing’ as:

more than deconstructing Western scholarship simply by our own retelling, or by sharing indigenous horror stories about research. In a decolonizing framework, deconstruction is part of a much larger intent. Taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and

giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people improve their current conditions. (1999, p. 4)

Similarly, Beth Blue Swadener and Kagendo Mutua (2008) describe decolonization as a materially consequential “process in both research and performance of valuing, reclaiming, and foregrounding indigenous voices and epistemologies” (p. 31). As Kagendo Mutua writes:

I started to see ways in which colonization and its products are more than a geopolitical historical experience that is limited in terms of both spatiality and temporality. Rather, I began to appreciate that the processes and outcomes of colonality are manifest in multiple ways in which “knowledge” makes possible the production and consumption of the Other. Furthermore, in such knowledge production, certain hegemonic power arrangements ensure the silence of certain Others in the process of the knowledge production that encrypts Othering identities. (Swadener & Mutua, 2008, p. 37)

Such approaches highlight how a process of decolonizing extends beyond colonial contexts, because “colonization in representation is more than a spatial-temporal experience” (Swadener & Mutua, 2008, p. 34).

A decolonizing approach to research allows me to move beyond a static opposition to colonization that often reinscribes colonizer/colonized categories. Instead, decolonizing lets me start with a dynamic position as a betweenner, being between and both colonizer and colonized, being between and both researcher and researched, experiencing privileges and marginalizations simultaneously in and around my marked body. The betweenner position is dynamic in the sense that it works against reifying oppositional categories by refusing to divide the oppressed versus the oppressor. As Diversi and Moreira write:

What does oppression mean to us? We contest static notions of oppression/oppressor/oppressed as enforcers of exclusiveness in

concepts of the Other. We still live in the betweenness of the postcolonial world: we are privileged in our positions of Third World scholars working in First World institutions yet do battle every day against the colonizing paradigms informing education, academic scholarship, and production of knowledge about the Other. (2009, p. 25)

Diversi and Moreira illustrate an example of decolonizing as a dynamic process, in which Claudio explains why he uses the term ‘white man’ in his positionality:

“The white man is also a moving category. What I try to do is to make the category static and move the other possible identities around this specific category. Not only to fight the oppression that comes from the category itself but also to illustrate the messiness within the category and the multiple identities or possibilities between them. That’s why I assume the position of a privileged white man. [...] When I am writing, I use the static white man to expose the privilege and use all the other possibilities of my body to criticize and undermine that whiteness.” (Claudio, in Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 24)

Decolonizing knowledge production, therefore, involves an always shifting stance that not only inquires into its own positionality and authority as a privileged producer of knowledge. Rather, acknowledging that ethnographers can never escape the project of representation, a decolonial approach to representation moves beyond simply reflecting on the power inherent in academic constructions of representation. Decolonial scholars instead provide an invitation to turn the academic gaze back toward critiquing the structures of knowledge production that provide the power and authority for validating only certain representations of other knowledges.

The term ‘indigenous’ thus becomes central to the concerns of decolonizing knowledge production, as a way of delineating and locating particular cultural identities and groups as having their own epistemologies and ontologies that may often clash with presumed standards of academic reliability and validity. Decolonizing methodologies

place special emphasis on the importance of ‘claiming’ in the process of a decolonizing approach to knowledge production. As an act of self-determination, ‘claiming’ allows me to locate a space from which I can engage specific ways of producing knowledge that do not fit within academically sanctioned modes. ‘Claiming’ also engages Emma Pérez’s concept of the decolonial imaginary (1999), a critical imaginative act of those bodies who not only resist colonization but who refuse and fight back against colonization, those who refuse to be colonized and cannot be colonized, who instead long for an imagined decolonial existence. Such an act of claiming does not simply seek to belong to already established categories, i.e. does not simply replicate existing cultural labels, but rather challenges those categories through a critical repositioning of self in resistance to those labels. Bryant Keith Alexander (2006), for example, describes the resistance between perception and claim when it comes to his role as an indigenous ethnographer:

I am perceived as a Black man who is trying to pass for White, not based on appearance but in the metaphoric drag of linguistic performance and wearing the garments of academic accomplishment. [...] I am deemed Bad Black Man because I seemingly do not perform the expected role of indigenous Black man, authentic Black man, real Black man—someone who is perceived to be organically connected to the Black community in ways that are deemed appropriate. (pp. 74-75)

Instead, for Alexander, ‘claiming’ becomes a process by which he can locate himself as belonging simultaneously to multiple communities, “as an indigenous ethnographer, one who claims membership in the cultural communities being written about” (2006, p. 139), one of which happens to be an academic community intent on knowledge production while another happens to be a group that resists academic colonization. Norman Denzin explicitly connects such a tension with the overriding project of decolonizing academic knowledge production. Drawing from the work of decolonial scholars such as Mutua,

Swadener, Semali and Kincheloe, Denzin (2005) describes “the pressing need for scholars to decolonize and deconstruct those structures within the Western academy that privilege Western knowledge systems and their epistemologies” (p. 936). That is, Denzin (2005) critiques the ways that the academy treats indigineous knowledge systems as “objects of study, treated as if they were instances of quaint folk theory held by the members of primitive cultures”—instead, Denzin pushes for a reversal, “making Western systems of knowledge the object of inquiry” (p. 936).

The question of knowledge production thus shifts from an objective stance—from the question of producing knowledge *about* the indigenous other—to a viscerally embodied stance that seeks to “dismantle, deconstruct, and decolonize Western epistemologies from within” (Denzin, 2005, p. 934). As Diversi and Moreira (2009) point out, “narratives of the decolonial imaginary can’t be told through disembodied analysis, statistics, or group differences” (p. 208). Rather, for Diversi and Moreira, “merely claiming to be a postcolonial researcher-teacher-writer isn’t enough to achieve a decolonizing praxis. This claim needs to come from an embodied narrative” (2009, p. 208). They conceptualize the in-between space as

a constant site of struggle against oppressive forces of colonization. And it’s not a metaphorical site but a bodily, visceral site. We want to recover and honor the embodiment of the in-between space, of the physical experience of betweenness. We want to highlight the lived experience of the body, of the flesh in these in-between spaces. And highlight not only the body of the Other but also the body of the narrative marker. The body of the researcher-writer is always present in the research-writing act. (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, pp. 207-208)

For Alexander (2006), such a location highlights the tension between experience and research:

I struggle with my representational positionality as an indigenous ethnographer claiming membership in the cultural communities that I explore—but held at arm’s length, distanced at (by) the academic impasse of documenting experience. [...] In some very palpable ways my position as an indigenous [ethnographer] evidences that the ethnographic researcher engaged in qualitative methods cannot stand outside of the politics of cultural criticism. I am always and already implicated in the cultural practices that I seek to critique. (pp. 139-140)

Diversi and Moreira (2009) similarly describe the dual implications of being betweeners in a decolonizing endeavor:

We have felt the joys and guilt of being included in “us.” We have felt the anger, fear, and anxiety of being “them.” And our accented, off-white, privileged lives bring us back to the space in between “us” and “them” on a daily basis. (p. 21)

The betweener position thus provides particular advantages to the decolonizing projects of the seventh moment. As Marcelo says: “It is the possibility for compassion that attracts me to the notion of betweenness. As I see it, we are all betweeners in some aspects of our identity” (Marcelo, in Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 25).

Drawing from Smith, Diversi and Moreira, Denzin, and Alexander, I position myself as an indigenous nomadic scholar, belonging to multiple intersecting communities—some with immigrant identities, some with religious affiliations, and some with markers of privilege within academic and professional communities—who is always held at “arm’s length” in any particular community due to multiple conflicting allegiances with other intersections. Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa to create my own roots, I situate my decolonizing research praxis in the act of writing within the academy: I write from my physical experiences of betweenness, highlighting how the narrative marker of my body is always in transit, both voluntary and involuntary, even in supposedly stable locations. My lived experiences in these in-between spaces provide my research

narratives for writing performance autoethnographies in ways that return our academic gaze back toward questioning the structures of written knowledge production in the academy in order to recognize that “research is always already both moral and political” (Denzin, 2005, p. 934).

Performance Autoethnography

In this section I describe the methodology of performance autoethnography that I propose to use for my thesis, situating the method within the ‘seventh moment’ of qualitative research. Within that methodologically contested tradition of research, performance autoethnography is a framework that operates at specific intersections of performance studies, autoethnography, and critical cultural studies. I first describe the particular trajectories of performance studies involved in these intersections. Next, I describe the particular methodological frameworks of autoethnography that resonate within the seventh moment. I then describe Denzin’s frameworks for linking and extending performance autoethnography with the performative cultural politics of critical work in the seventh moment within the academy.

Performance, Performativity, and Culture

There are particular theories of ‘performance’ that I connect with for the purposes of my work in this thesis. These theories are based in Dwight Conquergood’s emphasis on performance-centric ways of knowing and experiencing culture through lived experience of everyday encounters, especially in liminal spaces of marginalization and silences. Conquergood theorizes performance as movement in his calls for a performative

cultural politics that focuses on the lived experiences of the oppressed and nomadic transients in global societies of constant upheaval and displacement. Drawing from Conquergood, Norman Denzin (2003) describes the performance turn in cultural studies that shifts the term ‘culture’ to

a verb, a process, an ongoing performance, not a noun, a product or a static thing [...] Performances and their representations reside in the center of lived experience. We cannot study experience directly. We study it through and in its performative representations. (p. 12).

Drawing from D. Soyini Madison, Denzin (2003) describes how such a conceptualization of culture turns performance into “a site where memory, emotion, fantasy, and desire interact with one another” (p. 12) and where “every performance is political, a site where the performance of possibilities occurs” (Madison, 1998, p. 277). In this section, I provide a brief overview situating the terms ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ in relation to everyday cultural acts of critique and resistance, especially through critical personal narratives. I then detail the connections that Conquergood’s performance theories provide for qualitative research in the seventh moment.

Performance as a term is often used to mean many different things, some in stark opposition to one another. One use of the term is to refer to theatrical practice, as drama and acting, as a staged performance—which could also include cases where the ‘stage’ is improvised out of everyday public spaces. Another use of the term is in reference to evaluating the accomplishment of particular tasks, such as athletic performances or an employee’s annual ‘performance review’. A third use of the term addresses the ways that myriad everyday actions fall into the realm of crafted acts and public rituals—such as the conversational joke or the negotiation of greetings at a restaurant. Focusing specifically

on connecting the term ‘performance’ with its cultural contexts, D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (2006) suggest that “performance has evolved into ways of comprehending how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world” (p. xii). For Madison and Hamera, this allows us to “enter the everyday and the ordinary and interpret its symbolic universe to discover the complexity of its extraordinary meanings and practices” (2006, p. xii).

Madison and Hamera propose approaching the study of performance through a dynamic interplay between theory, method, and event as follows:

performance theory provides analytical frameworks; performance method provides concrete application; and performance event provides an aesthetic or noteworthy happening. (2006, p. xii)

Madison and Hamera also connect with Dwight Conquergood’s similar frameworks for performance studies expressed in terms of his alliterations:

I’s	Imagination,	inquiry,	intervention
A’s	Artistry,	analysis,	activism
C’s	Creativity,	critique,	citizenship

Conquergood (2002) described his three I’s as follows:

Performance studies is uniquely suited for the challenge of braiding together disparate and stratified ways of knowing. We can think through performance along three criscrossing lines of activity and analysis. We can think of performance (1) as a work of imagination, as an object of study; (2) as a pragmatics of inquiry (both as model and method), as an optic and operation of research; (3) as a tactics of intervention, an alterative space of struggle. (p. 152)

Along similar lines, Conquergood also positioned his A’s and C’s in ways that suggest analogous criscrossings: “... we often refer to the three a’s of performance studies:

artistry, analysis, activism. Or to challenge the alliteration, a commitment to the three c’s

of performance studies: creativity, critique, citizenship (civic struggles for social justice).” (2002, p. 152).

In connecting performance with everyday modes of social and cultural life, a particular area of intersection involves the performed nature of cultural identity especially in everyday social behavior. Judith Butler (1988) uses the term ‘performativity’ to refer to how embodied acts are repeated and reiterated in stylized ways such that they become normative for particular embodied identities. As Madison and Hamera (2006) describe it, such a view links performativity with the ways by which cultural conventions and traditions are inscribed and performed through the body:

How the body moves about in the world and its various mannerisms, styles, and gestures are inherited from one generation through space and time to another and demarcated within specific identity categories. These performativities become the manifestations and enactments of identity and belonging. (p. xviii)

That is, Butler’s concept of ‘performativity’ explains how identity categories of gender, race, class, sexuality, etc., are not essentially determined by biology but rather socially enacted through performativities as everyday acts of repetition and citationality. For Madison and Hamera, performativity as a concept for understanding the connections between cultural identity and everyday actions “opens the possibility for alternate performativities and alternative ways of being” (2006, p. xviii).

Leveraging this critical dimension of performativity as citationality and connecting with Conquergood’s approach to performance as intervention, Madison and Hamera suggest that “we may also understand performativity as an intervention upon citationality and of resisting citationality” (2006, p. xviii). Crucially, Madison and Hamera propose that:

Just as performativity is an internalized repetition of hegemonic “stylized acts” inherited by the status quo, it can also be an internalized repetition of subversive “stylized acts” inherited by contested identities. (2006, p. xviii-xix).

Elin Diamond (1996) implicates the body as a key site for cultural critique in navigating both performativity and performance in the collisions “between a ‘doing’ (a reiteration of norms) and a thing done (discursive conventions that frame our interpretations), between someone’s body and the conventions of embodiment” (p. 5). Kristin Langellier (1999) connects the importance of personal narratives in that link between the body and convention:

Identity and experience are symbiosis of performed story and the social relations in which they are materially embedded: sex, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, geography, religion, and so on. This is why personal narrative performance is especially crucial to those communities left out of the privileges of dominant culture, those bodies without voice in the political sense. (p. 129)

That is, with the body as an intensely visceral and material intersection between performativity and performance, deeply personal narratives provide a critical and necessary nexus for performances that intervene and move toward broader social critique.

Dwight Conquergood puts performance into motion through his shift from *mimesis* to *poiesis* to *kinesis*. Building on the theorizing of performance as imitation (e.g. through Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical theories of performance) and as invention (e.g. through Victor Turner’s constructional theories of performance as ‘making, not faking’), Conquergood (1998) theorizes performance as intervention, as a dynamic “breaking and remaking” (p. 32). Conquergood draws from Michel de Certeau (1980/1984) in navigating this “kinetic turn toward process and event in ethnography and cultural studies” (Conquergood, 1998, p. 31), a turn that moves away from “structure, stasis,

continuity, and pattern” toward “process, change, improvisation, and struggle” (1998, p. 31). Conquergood emphasizes the shift toward struggle in order for ethnographers to “avoid apolitical theories of motion as free play, floating ironic detachments, and the endless deferral of political commitment—the hollow luxury of never having to take a stand” (1998, p. 31). Conquergood’s commitment to “take a stand” against oppression drives the dynamism in his theorizing of performance, especially as he draws from Homi Bhabha’s use of the term ‘performative’ to frame performance as “action that incessantly insinuates, interrupts, interrogates, and antagonizes powerful master discourses” (1998, p. 32). Conquergood traces such performances in trajectories of motion within Bhabha’s (1994) “contentious, performative space” (p. 157), a space that “aims to subvert, not sustain, tradition” (Conquergood, 1998, p. 32) since “tradition needs to be problematized, particularly in a postcolonial world characterized by dislocation, discontinuity, and diaspora communities” (Conquergood 1998, p. 32). Thus, Conquergood sets performance in motion as a dynamism that “flourishes in the liminal, contested, and re-creative space between deconstruction and reconstruction, crisis and redress” (1998, p. 32). But it is a particular type of flourishing that Conquergood calls for: not “transcendence, a higher plane that one breaks into” but “transgression, that force which crashes and breaks through sedimented meanings and normative traditions and plunges us back into the vortices of political struggle” (1998, p. 32).

Conquergood’s emphases on the connections between performance and struggle also implicate the performance researcher toward a sustained ethical and moral project of critiquing the researcher’s own positions in structures of authority and oppression, beginning with challenging the particular colonial or positivist agendas of the research

project itself. Conquergood (1989) highlights four aspects of a performance-based research epistemology: *poetics*, *play*, *process*, and *power*. As Conquergood describes them, “these four words derive much of their meaning from the terms they resist and displace. They are set in opposition to terms such as ‘science,’ ‘structure,’ ‘system,’ ‘distance,’ ‘objectivity,’ ‘neutral observer,’ and ‘falsifiability’” (1989, p. 83). Each of these four dimensions has critical implications for the further development of performance studies in the seventh moment of qualitative research:

- *Poetics* connotes an emphasis on the “fabricated, invented, imagined, constructed nature of human realities” where “cultures and selves are not given, they are made; even, like fictions, they are ‘made up’ ... cultures and persons are more than just created; they are creative. They hold out the promise of reimagining and refashioning the world” (Conquergood, 1989, p. 83). Performance research becomes a site for storytelling: “scholarly writing is the persuasive telling of a story about the stories that one has witnessed and lived” (Conquergood, 1989, p. 83).
- *Play* connotes a focus on the “unmasking and unmaking tendencies that keep cultures open and in a continuous state of productive tension” (Conquergood, 1989, p. 83). Conquergood suggests that ethnographers tap into a ‘trickster’ vocabulary of expression for the purpose of “playing with social order, unsettling certainties... [intensifying] awareness of the vulnerability of our institutions” (1989, p. 83). For Conquergood, a “trickster’s playful impulse promotes a radical self-questioning critique that yields a deeper self-knowledge, the first step towards transformation” (1989, p. 83).

- ***Process*** connotes a shift where “culture becomes an active verb, not a noun” (Conquergood, 1989, p. 83). That is, “instead of static structures and stable systems with variables that can be measured, manipulated, and managed, culture is transacted through performance” (Conquergood, 1989, p. 83). Conquergood calls ethnographers of culture to “listen over time to the unfolding voices, nuances, and intonations of performed meaning” (1989, p. 83).
- ***Power*** connotes an emphasis on performance as a public site of “politics, history, ideology, domination, resistance, appropriation, struggle, conflict, accomodation, subversion, and contestation” (Conquergood, 1989, p. 84). For Conquergood, this leads to crucial questions around power: “How does performance reproduce, legitimate, uphold, or challenge, critique, and subvert ideology? ... How are performances situated between forces of accomodation and resistance? And how do they simultaneously reproduce and struggle against hegemony? What are the performative resources for interrupting master scripts?” (1989, p. 84).

These specific trajectories of performance studies come together in Conquergood’s own emphases on the shift away from a colonizing impetus toward capturing and controlling knowledge about the other and toward a decolonial understanding of the lived experiences of oppression. Such an approach cannot begin without fully grasping the significance of how “the subordinate classes ... understand from experience the ocular politics that links the powers to see, to search, and to seize. Oppressed people everywhere must watch their backs, cover their tracks, hide their feelings, and veil their meanings” (Conquergood 1998, p. 30). To understand the lived experience of such dynamic tactics of survival, Conquergood suggests that “instead of

endeavoring to rescue the *said* from the *saying*, a performance paradigm struggles to recuperate the *saying* from the *said*, to put mobility, action, and agency back into play” (1998, p. 31). Norman Denzin connects Conquergood’s performance and political projects within a critical cultural studies approach to naming and remaking material social worlds. Drawing from Conquergood’s call for “performance-sensitive ways of knowing” (1998, p. 26), Denzin suggests that such approaches “contribute to an epistemological and political pluralism that challenges existing ways of knowing and representing the world” (Denzin, 2003, p. 8). Connecting with Conquergood’s nomadic paradigm for performance studies, as a nomadic transnational scholar I study my own tactical performances of refusing and challenging and fighting against the ocular politics of colonization and interrogation in a variety of transit spaces—from hospital rooms to classrooms, from parking lots to church halls, from airport security to academic hallways.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method for critical inquiry into lived experiences in the intersections between selves and cultures. If ethnography is the project of writing (-graphy) about a collective culture (ethno-), Françoise Lionnet (1991, p. 108) suggests that autoethnography uncovers and problematizes the resistances between the self (auto-) and the collective (-ethno-) in the act of writing (-graphy). As such, autoethnography is a particular focal point for the seventh moment’s emphases on the crucial role of the researcher’s self-reflexive presence embodied in the processes of inquiry within and against repressive cultural and political structures. Norman Denzin (2003) suggests that autoethnography is a “new writing [that] asks only that we all

conduct our ground-level criticism aimed at the repressive structures in our everyday lives” (p. 142). The shift of focus to the self engaging with culture in everyday life is critical to autoethnography, as a mode of research in the postmodern and poststructural complexity of the seventh moment.

Denzin (2003) points to the autoethnographer’s singular function as researcher and researched in the process:

The autoethnographer functions as a universal singular; a single instance of a more universal social experience. As Sartre (1981) describes the universal singular, this subject is “summed up and for this reason universalized by his epoch, he resumes it by reproducing himself in it as a singularity” (p. ix). Every person is like every other person, but like no other person. The autoethnographer inscribes the experiences of a historical moment, universalizing these experiences in their singular effects on a particular life. (p. 234)

The connections between lived experience in a singular life and the universalizing maneuver comes through critical cultural analysis. For Denzin and Lincoln (2005a), researchers in the seventh moment are called to be “always mindful of the structural processes that make race, gender, and class potentially repressive presences in daily life” (p. 1084). For example, Ronald Pelias (2004) characterizes autoethnographic research as “in search of the nexus of self and culture. They show a self maneuvering through time and space to reveal how cultural logics enable and constrain. They seek a resonance” (p. 11). John Clarke, Stuart Hall, and others have described the positioning of the individual biography in relation to critical cultural studies of social formations and structures as follows:

We can distinguish, broadly, between three aspects: structures, cultures and biographies... biographies are the ‘careers’ of particular individuals through these structures and cultures—the means by which individual identities and life-histories are

constructed out of collective experiences... Biographies cut paths in and through the determined spaces of the structures and cultures in which individuals are located. (Clarke et al., 1975/1993, p. 57)

In interrogating those “determined spaces” through individual experience, the “critical autoethnographer enters those strange and familiar situations that connect critical biographical experiences (epiphanies) with culture, history, and social structure” (Denzin, 2003, p. 34). As Pelias (1998) puts it, such studies feature “authored selves that cannot be ignored... braid[ing] together the knower and the known and, at times, the knower and the known into one” (p. 16).

Bryant Keith Alexander (2005) defines autoethnography as a method of qualitative research that “engages ethnographical analysis of personally lived experience” (p. 423). However, Alexander remarks that:

The evidenced act of showing in autoethnography is less about reflecting on the self in a public space than about using the public space and performance as an act of critically reflecting culture, an act of *seeing the self see the self through and as the other*. Thus, as a form of performance ethnography, it is designed to engage a locus of embodied reflexivity using lived experience as a specific cultural site that offers social commentary and cultural critique... (2005, p. 423).

In linking autoethnography to autobiography, Alexander (1999) provides double levels of connection, both between ethnography and biography and between past and present:

Autobiography, like theory, is a process of recreating, re-viewing and making sense of the biographic past. [...] The critical move of making sense of the *autobiographic past* is the project of autoethnography. (p. 309)

Drawing from Deborah Reed-Danahay, Alexander (2006) says autoethnography refers to both “the ethnography of personal cultural experience and to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interests” (p. xx). However, the biography of the researcher’s

cultural experience in the past is also connected to the project of the researcher's scholarship in the present: "autoethnography is an articulation based on the determinate memory and recall of experience via the lens of traumatically constrained ideology that undergirds cultural encounters, but autoethnography is also a particular stratagem to describe the continuing racialization of politics in ethnographic and intercultural research" (Alexander, 2006, p. xx).

As such, Alexander (2006) characterizes autoethnography as a powerful method of use in the present by historically silenced voices:

Autoethnography and autobiography signal the strained ability and the necessary critical reflection that marginalized groups must engage to find and redefine our identities. This project always takes place in relation to the historical happenings that have left not only the residue scars of experience, but also foreshadows ongoing acts of violence that still dictate human social relations. (p. xx)

Alexander's focus on autoethnography's "necessary critical reflection" subsequently emphasizes "the specificity of voice, who is talking and why, with a certain level of accountability from that specific racial and gendered positionality" (2006, p. xx).

Alexander (1999) invokes such a reflexivity to connect the projects of ethnography, autobiography, and autoethnography "as a way of reading between the lines of my own lived experience and the experiences of cultural familiars—to come to a critical understanding of self and other and those places where we intersect and overlap" (p. 310). Such a critical understanding is often not just motivated but necessitated by experiences and pressures deeply rooted in the personal context of the researcher:

... issues of personal survival motivate scholarly production ... I am positioning myself as an affected party, as a community member, or as an indigenous ethnographer. Through autoethnography, I am exploring and sometimes exposing my own vulnerability to racial,

gender, and cultural critique as a method of both understanding self and other, and self as other, while engaging in performances (written and embodied) that seek to transform the social and cultural conditions under which I live and labor. (Alexander, 2005, p. 433)

That is, Alexander connects questions of personal survival involving both the realm of the material—the very real material constraints of hunger and poverty for example—but also involving the consequential realm of the social and cultural.

Following Alexander and Denzin, in my thesis I hope to engage my lived and still living experience from within concrete spaces of everyday life to interrogate those cultural familiars where my self and other intersects with others, viewing my self as other and interacting with culture in order to name and change it. And such an engagement with culture is not optional for me, but rather it is a deeply embodied issue of ethical and personal survival: my one-year-old daughter's interracial skin already marks her for a between-er's life of resisting origin stories (Diversi & Moreira, 2009). Her future questions thunder in my ears, now, both necessitating and motivating my reflexive and vulnerable acts of autoethnographic performances that seek to transform the social and cultural conditions under which she and I might live and labor.

Performance Autoethnography and a Performative Cultural Politics

Extending Conquergood's call for a performative cultural politics, Norman Denzin (2003) builds on the work of Conquergood, Della Pollock, D. Soyini Madison, and Henry Giroux to "retheorize the grounds of cultural studies, redefining the political and the cultural in performative and pedagogical terms" (p. 230). Denzin continues Conquergood's shift of culture as a noun to culture as a verb, a shift that makes

performance a central aspect of cultural studies and links performance to everyday lived experience because:

Performances and their representations reside in the center of lived experience. We cannot study experience directly. We study it through and in its performative representations. (Denzin, 2003, p. 12)

Drawing from D. Soyini Madison, Denzin (2003) describes how such a conceptualization of culture turns performance into “a site where memory, emotion, fantasy, and desire interact with one another” (p. 12) and where “every performance is political, a site where the performance of possibilities occurs” (Madison, 1998, p. 277). Such a performative view of culture puts individual lives in motion through acts of doing culture as a verb, where “performance is a form of agency, a way of bringing culture and the person into play” (Denzin, 2003, p. 9).

For Denzin, performance provides a critical link between the individual and the political, since “in all of our stories culture is performed, and the political becomes personal and pedagogical” (2003, p. 23). Through entwining culture and performance into the political, Denzin suggests that performance “becomes a critical site of power, and politics” (2003, p. 13-14). The issue of power is especially important for Denzin in the work of the seventh moment, where “power and culture are opposite sides of the same coin. The conditions under which they are joined and connected are constantly changing” (2003, p. 231-232). Drawing from Henry Giroux, Denzin suggests that “power (like culture) is always local, contextual, and performative, linking ideologies, representations, identities, meanings, texts, and contexts” (2003, p. 231-232) to existing structures and power arrangements. For Denzin, pedagogy becomes a key site for engaging cultural politics and power through performance, as the “performative becomes an act of doing,

an act of resistance, a way of connecting the biographical, the pedagogical, and the political” (Denzin, 2003, pp. 13-14). Connecting with Bryant Keith Alexander (2004), Denzin traces the pedagogical impetus that is central to a performative cultural politics: “Performance becomes public pedagogy when it uses the aesthetic, the performative, to foreground the intersection of politics, institutional sites, and embodied experience” (Denzin, 2003, p. 9).

The publicly pedagogical aspect of performative cultural politics become especially important in recasting the roles of researcher and researched as proactive agents. In a performative cultural politics, performance studies and autoethnography come together in centering the agency of the individual within the kinetic project of studying culture as a process of doing, not as a product. That is, the “observer and the observed are coperformers in a performance event. Autoethnographer-performers insert their experiences into the cultural performances that they study” (Denzin, 2003, p. 12). Thus, autoethnography joins with performance in the staging of ethical political projects, where “culture and power are experienced in the pedagogical performances that occur” (Denzin, 2003, p. 231) in everyday public spaces. Connecting with Giroux, Denzin describes such a view of culture as “public pedagogy, a set of recurring interpretive practices that connect ethics, power, and politics” (Denzin, 2003, p. 231). Drawing from Kristin Langellier’s work, Denzin (2003) remarks on the connections between performance, autoethnography, and public pedagogy:

The autoethnographer invites members of the community to become coperformers in a drama of social resistance and social critique. Acting from an informed ethical position, offering emotional support to one another, coperformers bear witness to the need for social change... (p. 17)

Such performances in public spheres “cannot be separated from power, politics or identity” (Denzin, 2003, p. 231), since it is through cultural performances in public spheres that “identities are forged and felt, agency is negotiated, citizenship rights are enacted, and the ideologies surrounding nation, civic culture, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation are confronted” (Denzin, 2003, p. 231).

The performative cultural politics of performance autoethnography is not just a politics of marginalized groups. Stuart Hall (1992/1996) describes marginality as having productive potential because it

... is not simply the opening within the dominant of spaces that those outside it can occupy. It is also the result of the cultural politics of difference, of the struggles around difference, of the production of new identities, of the appearance of new subjects on the political and cultural stage. This is true not only in regard to race, but also for other marginalized ethnicities, as well as around feminism and around sexual politics in the gay and lesbian movement, as a result of a new kind of cultural politics. (p. 467)

That is, as Denzin (2003) describes: “These are pedagogical performances that matter.

They give a voice to the subaltern. They do something in the world. They move people to action” (pp. 17-18). Denzin (2003) therefore describes the performative political project of the seventh moment as follows:

Thus in the seventh moment we seek emancipatory, utopian performances, texts grounded in the distinctive styles, rhythms, idioms, and personal identities of local folk and vernacular culture. These performances record the histories of injustices experienced by the members of oppressed groups. They show how members of local groups have struggled to find places of dignity and respect in a violent, racist, and sexist civil society. These performances are sites of resistance. They are places where meanings, politics, and identities are negotiated. They transform and challenge stereotypical forms of cultural representation—white, black, Chicano, Asian American, Native American, gay, or straight. (p. 123)

Given this political project, Carolyn Ellis, Art Bochner, Laurel Richardson and Bryant Alexander are just a few of many who have put forward rigorous guidelines for performance autoethnography and a performative cultural politics. For Denzin (2003), the “tales and performances of the seventh moment are organized by a counterhegemonic, or subversive, utopian anti-aesthetic” (pp. 122-123).

Drawing from the guidelines provided by Ellis, Bochner, and Richardson, Denzin (2003) suggests seven aspects that autoethnographies in the seventh moment should perform (pp. 123-124):

1. Unsettle, criticize, and challenge taken-for-granted, repressed meanings.
2. Invite moral and ethical dialogue while reflexively clarifying their own moral positions.
3. Engender resistance and offer utopian thoughts about how things can be made different.
4. Demonstrate that they care, that they are kind.
5. Show instead of tell, using the rule that less is more.
6. Exhibit interpretive sufficiency, representational adequacy, and authentic adequacy.
7. Present political, functional, collective, and committed viewpoints.

In my work, I use these seven guidelines as the framework for producing the contents of my thesis. As a migrant transnational scholar living and laboring in non-cosmopolitan New England, I claim membership in multiple local communities within which I seek to transform and challenge multiple stereotypical forms of cultural representation. For example, while I become a New Englander, my brown and bearded

body is often mistaken for Sayid, the Iraqi character in the popular American TV series *LOST*, who is played by Naveen Andrews, a brown and bearded British man born in England to Indian parents who happen to be from the same part of South India as my parents. Sayid's character is a torturer in the Iraqi army, but Naveen Andrews' British accent and South Indian body suffice to represent Iraqi masculinity for American audiences—Orientalism is alive and well on American television even as American troops wage bloody war on Iraqi civilians. Through performance autoethnography, I engage a performative cultural politics of decolonizing the multiple representational categories that seek to exert their multiple claims on my body, as experienced in everyday interpellations in the locations where I live and labor.

Performance Writing / Scholarship

Writing as a performance of scholarship is a central site of action for the decolonizing projects of performance autoethnography and performative cultural politics in the academy. Scholars of performance have supplanted the textualism of research reports with scholarship that is primarily embodied in acts of performance. Meanwhile, the act of writing research texts has itself been conceptualized as an act of performance, leading to re-enacted modes of writing scholarship through performance texts. Within the methodologically contested framework of the seventh moment, acts of writing performative research texts confront dominant performances of scholarship in ways that transcend debates on form or style.

Writing/presenting in 1995 on the campus of his alma mater, at the Otis J. Aggertt Festival hosted by Indiana State University on *The Future of Performance Studies*:

Visions and Revisions, Dwight Conquergood (1998) suggested in his keynote paper titled “Beyond the Text: Toward a Performative Cultural Politics” that performance scholars should challenge the domination of textualism in the academy by “juxtaposing performed scholarship with written scholarship” (p. 33). His view was that performance “as both an object and method of research will be most useful if it interrogates and decenters, without discarding, the text. I do not imagine the world, particularly the university world, without texts, nor do I have any wish to stop writing myself” (Conquergood, 1998, p. 33). While his untimely death from colon cancer in 2004 prematurely stopped his writing, his scholarship paves a way for his words to continue “writing [himself]” in challenging the dominant epistemologies in the academy to create spaces for performance research. Conquergood (1998) remarked that the “move from scholarship about performance to scholarship as, *scholarship by means of*, performance strikes at the heart of academic politics and issues of scholarly authority” (p. 33). Some of the major issues involved in such a move are:

What are the epistemological underpinnings that would legitimate performance as a supplementary, complementary, or alternative form of research publication? What are the institutional practices that would open space for performance as scholarship? What are the rhetorical challenges and strategies for framing performance as scholarship? (Conquergood, 1998, p. 33)

Della Pollock, one of Conquergood’s former students, delivered a response to Conquergood’s paper at the same Festival, in which she proposes a shift of textuality to make “writing serve performance/performativity through ‘performative writing’ ... writing beyond textuality into a multiply articulated, performative real” (Pollock, 1998b, p. 44). At the same Festival, Ronald Pelias delivered a keynote speech where he advocates for a pluralism in performance research that treats performance as an

“epistemic method” in order to “report beyond the stage what we discover in our production work” (Pelias, 1998, p. 20). For both Pollock and Pelias, the centrality of the body in the act of writing transforms research about performance into performative scholarship.

Pollock (1998b) suggests that performative writing is not only about writing differently from conventions of traditional scholarship, since unconventional writing can still be done “without sufficient regard for the extent to which narrative, inter/textual, autobiographical, or experience-based writing may remain text-centric” (p. 44). That is, instead of treating writing itself as the text-producing problem, Pollock (1998b) suggests that even conventionally written scholarship can be performative when it is intensely aware of the “prerogative of its own performativity” (p. 44). Such an awareness in writing performance scholarship produces research texts that:

make textuality tremble with both loss and possibility—with, among other things, the limits of textual epistemologies, the pressure of multiple “others” on its form and course, the mark of its own insufficiency to encompass the “vital and carnal topography” it projects, and the volatility of the multiple “reckonings” to which it must succumb. (Pollock, 1998b, p. 44)

Using Conquergood’s essays as an example, Pollock (1998b) suggests that such scholarship “invites the kinetics of performance into the practice of the essay itself” (p. 44). Referring to Conquergood’s writing in terms that echo Zora Neal Hurston’s critique of textual capture, Pollock (1998b) suggests that Conquergood “writes past textuality, writing *in* the embodied subject who sees the textual decoy for what it is, reads it anyway, and appreciates the joke, writing *into* a text-space permeated with performance” (p. 44). In her essay on Performing Writing, Pollock (Pollock, 1998a) argues that performance

writing must “make writing/textuality speak to, of, and through pleasure, possibility, disappearance, and even pain... to make writing perform” (p. 79). She connects writing with embodied scholarship in outlining some dimensions of a possible framework for performative writing as *evocative*, *metonymic*, *subjective*, *nervous*, *citational*, and *consequential* (Pollock, 1998a, pp. 80-96). The researcher/writer/reader’s body is inextricable from the text for Pollock’s connection between textuality and performativity. For example, writing is performative when the “writer and the world’s bodies intertwine in evocative writing, in intimate coperformance of language and experience” (Pollock, 1998a, p. 81). Similarly, performative writing is nervous not

in the sense of glancing or superficial (or even merely anxious) [but] ‘nervous’ writing follows the body’s model: it operates by synaptic relay, drawing one charged moment into another, constituting knowledge in an ongoing process of transmission and referral, finding in the wide-ranging play of textuality an urgency that keeps what amounts to textual travel from lapsing into tourism, and that binds the traveler to his/her surging course like an electrical charge to its conduit. (Pollock, 1998a, p. 91)

The consequential dimension of performative writing is where Pollock (1998a) grounds the embodied project of performative research in the constitutive project of rhetoric: “just as performative evocation is not mimetic, and nervous performativities are not only intertextual, so performative writing that is consequential is not broadly rhetorical” (p. 95). That is, Pollock (1998a) connects performative scholarship with Maurice Charland’s work on constitutive rhetoric to suggest that “performative rhetoric names a new public... in part through the kind of evocative processes described earlier, it projects new modes of being and relating through its forms, constituting the very norms by which it will be read” (p. 95).

Similarly, Ronald Pelias (2004) argues for an embodied conjoining of performance and research in his call for scholarship that is “evocative, multifaceted, reflexive, empathic, and useful” (p. 12). In framing his work as a turn toward the poetic essay, Pelias (1999) wants to poeticize the researcher’s body, the subject of his book titled *Writing Performance*, in which he explicitly rejects standards of conventional academic writing: “By calling upon the poetic, I discard notions of verification, reliability, and facticity for plural truths rooted in the personal” (p. xi). For Pelias, performance writing is an explicit and purposeful move toward a different form of research:

I turn to the poetic with the hope that I might pursue both the possibilities of disappearance and the power of presence. Instead of writing a work that hits hard, that is straight to the point, that is based in well-formulated arguments, carefully arranged to leave no room for doubt; instead of crippling my critics, recruiting new members and eliciting new allegiances; instead of being armed, ready for a good fight, ready to enjoy the bounty of conquest, I want to write in another shape. I seek a space that unfolds softly, one that circles around, slides between, swallows whole. I want to live in feelings that are elusive, to live in doubt. I want to offer an open hand that refuses to point but is unwilling to allow injustices to slip through its fingers. I want to be here for the taking, a small figure against the academic wall. (Pelias, 1999, pp. xi-xii)

Echoing Adrienne Rich, Pelias (1999) frames the poetic essay as “an instrument of embodied experience,” one that “seeks a different standard for presenting the performance event on the page” (p. xiii). Pelias (1999) suggests four criteria for ways that the poetic essay might become “a mode for rendering performance,” namely coherence, plausibility, imagination, and empathy (p. xiii):

- A **coherent** poetic essay holds together but in “harmonious and inharmonious combinations [in which] the essay finds its voice, a voice that often cannot be contained within a single speaker” (Pelias, 1999, p. xiii).
- A **plausible** poetic essay “offers a convincing narrative... seeks an internal logic, one that may be filled with ambiguity, tension, and contradictions... it illustrates the possible” (Pelias, 1999, p. xiii).
- An **imaginative** poetic essay is literary: “it privileges the sensuous, the figurative, the expressive... it calls for an aesthetic transaction, an encounter between the writer and the reader... it demands engagement” (Pelias, 1999, p. xiii).
- And, an **empathic** poetic essay “is marked by respect... to feel with others, to understand what others see... it works for a generosity of spirit that creates space for others... it invites dialogue” (Pelias, 1999, p. xiii).

In my thesis, I draw from aspects of performative writing from Della Pollock and Ronald Pelias in putting together texts that create spaces for engaging you and me toward interpretive encounters, where you are invited to imagine, re-imagine, co-author, and co-perform new experiences through my textual performances. I use the ethical and dynamic methods that Pollock and Pelias put forward as what Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) call “technolog[ies] of justification”:

meaning a way of defending what we assert we know and the process by which we know it. Thus, the education of critical researchers demands that everyone take a step back from the process of learning research methods. (p. 318)

Therefore, in composing my performance texts I draw from the methods of performing writing, as described by Pollock, Pelias, Denzin, Anzaldúa, Weems, Alexander, Moreira

and many others for my writing, selecting from them as my research circumstances require in order to defend what I claim to know and the process by which I know it.

Overview of Performance Texts

Connecting with Mary E. Weems concept of ‘messy’ writing (2003) and with Claudio Moreira’s extension of the concept toward writing fragmented performance acts (2007), I produce a messy and layered collection of performance texts as acts where “each act intends to stand alone as a singular performance or text. At the same time, the acts are intertwined, closely connected with each other” (Moreira, 2007, p. 23). Indeed, this whole thesis can be seen to be a sequence of “experimental, ‘messy,’ layered poetic and performance texts” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1121), each performing a different but connected sequence of lived experiences. As Ronald Pelias (2004) points out, even so-called traditional academic writing tells a story:

Whenever we engage in research, we are offering a first-person narrative. Even our most traditional work is someone’s story. Notice:

Review of the Literature: I had been reading about this subject for a long time now. Working through this reading, I realized that I might classify it into several categories. After doing that, I saw that there were still several questions unanswered.

Research Question: I really wanted to know what was going on with this unexplored area.

Procedure: So I decided that I would collect some information on the subject. I gathered together a bunch of people, people of various types and from various places, and I asked them about my question.

Results: I added up all their responses, did a few calculations, and their responses were just what I guessed what they would be.

Interpretation: I can explain what everyone said lots of different ways, but I believe this one way makes the most sense. I have lots more questions to ask, but I sure feel better now that I have an answer to my question. (pp. 7-8)

Therefore, this thesis has already been performing a series of stories for specific purposes as an academic work presented within an academic context.

The acts that follow this particular act signal their break from “traditional” academic writing in many ways. As Norman Denzin (2003) describes:

A performance writing text may contain pictures, such as photographs or drawings. It may look distinctive on the page, perhaps set in double or triple columns and using unusual spacing between words and lines. It may be deeply citational, with footnotes or endnotes. It may be broken into sections that are separated by rows of asterisks or dingbats. It may combine several different types of texts, such as poetry, first-person reflections, quotations from scholarly works, and the daily newspaper. (p. 94).

Indeed, the following acts borrow from the above facets but also push beyond, experimenting with both form and content, both style and function, to invite multiple readings and viewings that range well beyond my expressed intent:

- ***Act III: speaking in silences***

This act explores voices and words that emerge when we re-imagine and re-perform actual prior encounters I experienced involving misconstructions of my identity. Written as performance dialogues, each of the scenes in this text culminate in a moment of splintered subjectivity—including the apparently singular remembrances of race and religion in the latter part of the performance. Through these scenes I seek to trouble constructions of racism that are overdetermined by geographic origin or color alone.

- *Act IV: stranger at the gate*

This act deliberately silences my own voice as a student encountering the field of performance studies in my first semester of graduate school. Instead, this act uses only quotations from multiple scholarly works layered and fragmented with(in) each other. These quotations, however, are not cited or identified explicitly in the text—rather, the words of multiple scholars are interspliced to evoke a jumble of voices, interacting and arguing with each other as they navigate paradigm shifts in performance studies during the various crises of representation and cultural politics through the 1990s. The quotes are drawn from a mixture of academic texts, including journal articles and books, as well as postings from the Communication Research and Theory Network (CRTNET) electronic mailing list. The CRTNET postings in particular involve the public critical expressions of academics in response to a special issue of *Text and Performance Quarterly*—others have analyzed these CRTNET postings in some depth (Gingrich-Philbrook, 1998; Edwards, 1999), but my goal here is to evoke an experience of reading these texts in relation to the more formal discourse in published journals by the same authors. In this act I seek to destabilize the notion of the academy as a stable repository of knowledge and I challenge the intense academic desire for scriptural re-citation.

- *Act V: performing english*

This act features scenes that challenge the assumptions behind the notion of “first language” or “mother tongue”, even as I claim English as my first language. In these scenes I invite audiences into memories of the multiple languages that

populated and colonized my family. Through these scenes, I seek to turn our gaze toward the structures that seek, simultaneously, to reify English as the language of the first world while forever linking Othered bodies to “first languages” based on their maternal origins.

- *Act VI: betraying performance*

This act explores the performative possibilities of a “traditional” academic essay, written as a series of reflections on the use of ‘metaphors’ as methodological tools in performance studies. Using the venue of a formal paper written to engage an academic conference panel on metaphors, I connect multiple academics together to trouble ‘safe’ and celebratory constructions of performance metaphors. Instead, I invoke a series of metaphors that refigure Dwight Conquergood’s ‘nomadic’ caravan (1998) metaphor to highlight the potentially dangerous collisions with entrenched regional racisms that migrants must navigate and experience on a daily basis.

- *Act VII: letters for eliana*

This act features three different letters to my one-year-old daughter Eliana, intertwined together with myself and her mother Alexis, through a photographic and poetic questioning of our geographic origins/destinies. While addressed to her, these letters also invite readers to imagine and challenge the illusory safety of ‘home’ and the assumed displacement of geography in the space of everyday conversations that seek to ‘know’ where someone else is from. The letters riff and reflect meditatively on D. Soyini Madison’s epiphanous insight into the visceral and embodied connections between geography and destiny, a moment of rupture

and critique that leads her to wonder if perhaps “geography is destiny after all” (Madison, 2010, p. 162). I began my stories in this thesis inspired by the momentum from her story, so I end my thesis with the visceral and poetic narratives of lived experience from those everyday spaces that Alexis and Eliana and I must navigate in supposedly postcolonial New England as a multiracial family.

ACT III
SPEAKING IN SILENCES

Introduction¹ (getting to know (me) beyond 100 words)

I should say this is about racism, if only I knew what conveniently available hyphenated races I should tattoo on my transnational/transreligious post-colonial (but all too willingly colonized) stubbornly narcissistic subversive subaltern body. I should say this is about racism, if only I did not suspect that a brown foreign man speaking about race in America today is expected to say certain things about racism. I should say this is about racism, if only I could perform an elegantly colonizing *ing* socioeconohistophilosophideologically constructed academic knowledge about racism that goes beyond the expected discourses of victim-speaking-out.

I should rather say something about subaltern performance of race that nonchalantly intertwines my brown subaltern body with more respected scholarly bodies, if only I knew Gayatri (Spivak) and Antonio (Gramsci) on the kind of first-name terms that I know Claudio, who now has a respectable scholarly body of his own that I do not know if I know as well or as little as I know him. I should, for example, say that this is about white hegemony, if only I did not so enjoy being white when I speak. I should say this is about ‘them,’ if only I owned a ‘them’ that let me belong to ‘them’ without whispering in my ear: “you were never really one of ‘us,’ you always wanted to be one of ‘them,’ you are even married to one of ‘them,’ so why do you pretend to defend us?”

¹ A version of this act was previously published (Kumar, 2010a) in *International Review of Qualitative Research* © 2009 International Institute for Qualitative Inquiry, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Reprinted with permission.

I should rather say this is about belonging and betrayal and *being* (Moreira, 2008, p. 609) in between the two, but my addiction to dynamic irreverence keeps me dancing around, always somewhere in between the boring you and your favorite exotic other.

Now I become close to you, but when you think

I am just as *boring* as you I dance maddeningly away,
warning you that I am unknowably *exotic*.

Now I speak like you,

but when you give me a space

for the subaltern to speak

before the professor speaks,

I speak in exotic accents to make a performance point that,

unintentionally,

shames the professor's bad English in front of undergraduate students.

(Sorry Claudio ...

I know you do not like to dance, but

thank you for showing me how.)

I should rather say this is about moments of misconstruction of identity and ethnicity, about silences invoked in my body rather than evoked by my body, if only I did not know how obnoxiously loud my inner silences really are in the daily tensions between boring and exotic. I should say much about those silent moments, but I said very little then, while so much was said by me in me for me. So all I have for you here are maddening silences.

Introduction (take 2 / double take)

Mike: Did you grow up here?

Bob: Were you born here?

Ahmed: You born here?

Janet: Are you from around here? Really?

Bill: Did you ... are you ... that is, you didn't grow up here, right?

Tom: Did your parents raise you here?

The Minivan Woman in St. Louis (2006)

Summer evening sun. Soft shadows. Empty parking lot of an office building in suburban St. Louis. Alexis is about to get into our rental car and I'm holding the door open for her. A minivan pulls up alongside, and a middle-aged white woman leans out the driver's window ...

Woman: Are you married to that man?

Alexis: Yes, why?

Woman: Isn't he from Pakistan or some place like that?

Alexis: Uhm, he's from India actually.

Woman: It's the same thing ... you are in for a world of trouble!

Alexis: Why?

Woman: Well ... they oppress women where he comes from!

What I wanted to say

Excuse me, ma'am, I see that you are wearing a cross on your necklace. Are you a Christian?

What I should have said

Oh, don't worry ma'am, she's wife number six. On Tuesdays I only oppress wives 1, 3, and 5.

So are we, and we believe in challenging systems of oppression very much the way Jesus did against the Pharisees of his day. And such systems exist even here in St. Louis.

What I said

<nothing>

What I did not say

Being from India is **NOT** the same as being from Pakistan.

What I am saying

I'm standing right here. I'm standing right next to Alexis. I have been standing here throughout your conversation. There is nobody else around except the three of us. What is it about my body, my professional engineer body, my colonized body clothed in pressed slacks and smart dress shirt, what is it about my brown and bearded yuppie body that you cannot stand to look at me when you're talking about me to my white wife?

Pastoral Relations (2003)

Three people relaxing around a kitchen table one Sunday afternoon after church. My pastor's wife has fed us a simple family meal fit for a feast. I am a single but content Christian man loved by my pastor and his family to whom I have become like a son ...

Pastor's wife: So, Hari, I hear you've found a new friend?

Me: Yes! Her name is Erica.

Pastor's wife: That's wonderful! Where is she from?

Me: New Hampshire, I think ...

Pastor: That reminds me, honey, do you remember Ayesha?

Pastor's wife: Yes! She was so sweet!

Pastor: I saw Ayesha in New Hampshire last weekend.

Pastor's wife: Oh!! ... Oh? Oh! ... For Hari?

Pastor: Yes! Hari, you should meet Ayesha. She's from Pakistan, like you!

Me: Uhm ... really?

Pastor: Yes, and she's so sweet, and beautiful, and really loves God. She's a little older than you, but Pakistani women age so well!

What I should have said

After knowing me for three years, two Christmases, serving in ministry together, having me over for dinner countless times, and welcoming me as almost a son into your family, after hearing me tell my Hindu-to-Christian conversion story numerous times to others in your living room, in your dining room, from your colonizing pulpit, you still think I'm from Pakistan?

What I said

<nothing>

What I am saying

Why do you keep mentioning Pakistani or Arab women when I talk about my white American dates? Do you think I would not date well with white American women? Or is it because, no matter how hard I try to colonize myself into performing a blonde-loving red-blooded American Christian male identity for you, I will still never be quite as eligible as the white all-American guitar-playing godly Christian bachelors in your church? Is it because I am a traitorous convert and you'd rather pair me up with another such traitor instead of exposing godly white middle-class American women to the risk of my world?

What I wanted to say

Yum, I love well-aged Pakistani women. Especially 1969 — I hear that is a good vintage for Pakistani women.

What I dared not say

No thanks, I prefer younger white American women. Like your daughter. But not your daughter, of course. She's too white. And too young. But mostly too white.

Introduction

Me: No. I was born in India but I left when I was seven and I grew up in the Middle East. I have been living in Massachusetts for twelve winters.

I remember (1999—2000)

mem•ber²: **noun**

1 an individual belonging to a group such as a society or team.

2 a constituent piece of a complex structure.

3 (archaic) a part or organ of the body, esp. a limb. (also **male member**) the penis.

re•mem•ber: **verb**

have in or be able to bring to one's mind an awareness of (someone or something that one has seen, known, or experienced in the past).

[with infinitive] do something that one has undertaken to do or that is necessary or advisable.

[with clause] used to emphasize the importance of what is asserted.

bear (someone) in mind by making them a gift or making provision for them.

(**remember someone to**) convey greetings from one person to (another).

pray for the success or well-being of.

(**remember oneself**) recover one's manners after a lapse.

ORIGIN: Middle English : from Old French *remembrer*, from late Latin *rememorari* 'call to mind,' from *re-* (expressing intensive force) + Latin *memor* 'mindful.'

² "member" and "remember": *New Oxford American Dictionary Second Edition*. (McKean, 2005)

{{+}}

expressing {{-}} (Claudio, see, I am *doing* and *being* a metaphor
intensive {{?}} moaning and groaning and pushing against
force {{!}} this relentlessly bracketing academic wall.)

{{ }}

I remember dating a young white undergraduate from South Carolina, long before I
met Alexis, when I was in graduate school in Boston.

I remember her white middle-aged middle-class single mother complaining to me
about how “those lazy blacks are always saying they are so tired!”

I remember the mother working long hours as a nurse in Charleston, and every
evening she had fresh stories about her black colleagues.

I remember her telling stories that only got worse as she began drinking her fatigue
away over the course of the night.

I remember watching TV with the mother one lazy summer evening in Charleston as
the news reported an armed robbery at a local convenience store.

I remember the mother saying, “Oh just watch now. They’re gonna show the suspect
and it’ll be one of them!”

I re-member both mother and daughter crowing in delight when the video clip of the
arrested criminal began revealing him to, indeed, be “one of them.”

I re-member wondering why the white mother felt comfortable sharing her racism with
me, the brown foreign guy dating her racist white daughter at the new
millennium.

I remember saying nothing.

I don't care. Alright? (2008)

It's a Thursday night. Late. A smoky bar in downtown Scranton, Pennsylvania. It's not very crowded in here. A few pool tables, a dartboard. Some regulars playing pool want us to join them, but we out-of-town visitors seem more interested in the dartboard ...

Scott: Hey, listen, I just wanna tell you something.

Me: Yeah, sure man, what's up?

Scott: I jus' wanna tell ya, I've been everywhere, alright? I've been to Germany, and Hong Kong, and uhh ... and ... to Serbia, alright? And, I just want you to know, I've never had a problem, alright?

Me: Sure, man.

Scott: No, you donnunderstan', I mean, we got along great, yaknowhaddimean? It doesn't matter to me, you know? Look, just look into my eyes, right—hey, look into my eyes, I wanna tell you something—I don't care where you come from, alright? You could be from fucking anywhere, alright? I don't have a problem with that. We're just here hanging out at this bar and having fun and playing pool, alright?

<a pause>

Me: Dude. I'm from Massachusetts.

Scott: I don't care! I don't fucking care! You could be from fucking Washington, D.C., alright? You could be right from the President's fucking ASS, alright? I don't care! We're just here to hang out and have some fun and play some pool, alright?

What I should have said

That's great! And, hey, if you're ever visiting Massachusetts, do drop by my neighborhood bar! Not only do those Massachusetts people not care where I'm from, they allegedly don't even care what I look like—can you believe that?!

What I wanted to say

Scott, thanks so much for welcoming me. It means a lot to me that you don't care. You know what, I don't fucking care where you're from either, alright?

What I said

<nothing>

What I am saying

No. It's not all right.

What I could not say

Scott, do you not care where I am from, or do you not care that I am the only non-white yuppie who walked in with three hot white chicks and two white yuppies, six young middle-class out-of-towners sticking out like sore thumbs in your working-class bar? Or do you not care that one of those hot white chicks that you've been trying to chat up is actually my wife?

Columbus Day (2004)

After church services one Sunday, as I'm cleaning up trash during my walk-through of the middle-school auditorium and chatting with various congregants, here come Bob and Marge ...

Bob: Har-ri!

Me: Hey Bob!

Bob: Hey you know what day it is tomorrow, right?

Me: Oh, right, yeah Bob—Columbus Day.

Bob: You know Columbus Day, right?

Me: Yeah Bob.

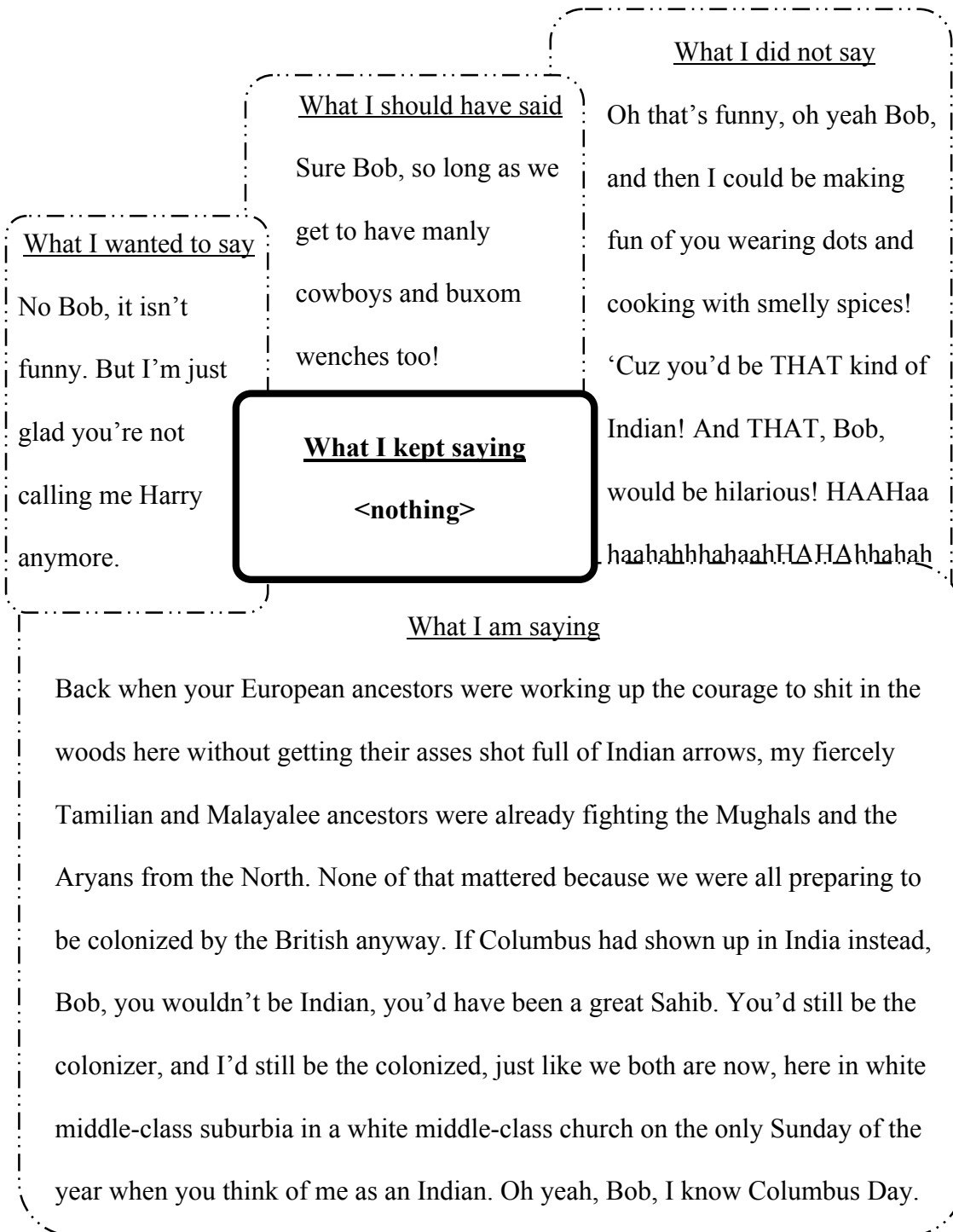
Bob: You know what I always say?

Me: What do you say, Bob? *[Having heard this for four straight years from Bob.]*

Bob: What I say is, if Columbus had taken a left instead of a right, WE would be Indians and YOU would be American! HAAAHAA HAAHAHAAAHA
HAAHA!

Me: Ha ha Bob.

Bob: HAAHAAA, I know, isn't that funny? I say that every Columbus Day, it's a hoot to think about, isn't it? Hey Marge, c'mere, I was just telling Har-ri that joke, and he's Indian! Isn't that funny?! HAHAHAHAhahaahaa...



Dirty Indian (1987, 1990, 1991, 2006)

Yemen, circa 1987...

Kid 1: Hey! Hey Hindi!

Me: <silent>

Kid 1: Hey, Hindi wulla Bakistani?!

Me: Hindi.

Kid 1: Hindi! Amitabh Bachchan! INDIA!

Me: <silent>

What I did not know to say

You want to know if I'm Muslim, that's why you're asking me if I'm Indian (Hindi) or Pakistani. If I'm Pakistani I am probably Muslim, but now that you know I'm Indian, you know that I am probably an idol-worshipping Hindu, and you're right. I'm just eleven years old, but I'm the kind of Hindu foreigner that your Imam told you in mosque this week to cleanse out of your Muslim country. What would you say if I had replied "Pakistani"? Would you invite me to mosque to pray with you? What do you know about my South Indian Tamilian family's struggle against Hindi, the language of North Indian oppression? What do you know of the dominance of Amitabh Bachchan and liberal Bollywood over my conservative South?

Yemen, circa 1990...

Kid 2: Shall I tell you a joke?

Me: Yes?

Kid 2: There was this Indian husband and wife at a party. Somebody asked the wife, “how old are you?” She said, “Oh, I am dirty, and my husband is dirty too!” Thirty, and thirty-two!

Me: <silent>

Kid 3: Dirty Indians.

Me: <silent>

What I could not say

Do you not already have a dagger in your belt and a gun in your bag? A gun that your military father gave you in the eighth grade when all my worker father could give me was a weak hope that intelligence is mightier than might? Are you not already a pure Muslim assured of salvation and me a filthy Hindu who faces the threat of deportation (or worse) because of my idols? *Am I not already a powerless foreigner at your mercy in your country, in your town, in your school, learning your language and your slang and your stories and your jokes?* Are you not already three years older than me, taller than me, bigger than me, even though we are in the same class? Have you not already kicked me enough times over the years to establish that I will never fight back, that I cannot fight back, that I do not know how to fight back, that I am more likely to cry than resist? And yet do I pose that much of a threat to you that you have to colonize yourself, that you went to the trouble of learning enough English to tell me a British joke?

Yemen, circa 1991 ...

Kid 4 (*in Arabic*): Hey, you Hindi!

Me: <silent>

Kid 4 (*in Arabic*): I own your father! He works for my father!

Me: <silent>

Kid 4 (*in Arabic*): I can have him fired! I can make you poor!

Me: <silent>

Kid 4 (*in Arabic*): I can send you and your whole family back to India!

Me: <silent>

Kid 4 (*in Arabic*): By Allah, you shitty Indians get the fuck out of our country!

My dad (*in Tamil*): Get in the car son! It's raining, let's go.

Cairo, Egypt, circa 2006 ...

Hawker: Hey! Hey Hindi!

Me: <silent>

Hawker: Hey, Hindi wulla Bakistani?!

Me: <silent>

Hawker: Hindi! Amitabh Bachchan! INDIA!

Me: Masri? Omar Sharif!! EGYPT!

My dad (*in Tamil*): Get Alexis in the car, son, let's go.

Introduction

Joe: Cuz your English is really good.
Gary: Your English is so well-spoken.
Scott: Man, your English is perfect!
Chang: Ah, that is why your English is better than mine.
John: Wow, you don't even have an accent!
Melissa: Well your English is excellent.

What I say

Thank you ...

What I should say

... and so is yours!

What I am saying

... but what gave me away? Why do you think I could not possibly be "from here"? I do have an accent—yours—so why the question? **What accent were you expecting before I eagerly swallowed your colonizing accent in my all too willing mouth?** Why are you surprised when the subversive subaltern performs your culture better than you?

ACT IV

STRANGER AT THE GATE

How should I perform an ethnography of scholarly representation in performance studies? As a newcomer to performance studies, when I read scholars coming to grips with their humanity in their ethnographic writings about “other” people, how do I not write about them but with them and for them? In their shift to performance studies I hear both dissonance and harmony. I hear not a sequenced march but an improvised and creative dance, a shuffle. I hear in their performances of the paradigm shuffle a poetic turn toward performative writing. So I represent these “other” scholars performatively, letting their scholarly bodies play intertextually and polyvocally within a disjointed framework that mixes futures and pasts. Instead of an artificially progressive account, I narrate my own fragmented experiences of being introduced to scholarly representations of disembodied scholars speaking to each other (and to you and to me), across time and space, through a turn toward poetic performative writing. In doing so, I attempt a decolonizing ethnography of scholarly representation by backgrounding my silence and foregrounding the voices of scholars from their written texts. And in so doing, I perform my own insecure shuffle, silent student agency without scholarly author-ity: NONE of the following words are mine, but I dance with them anyway. Forgive the sacrilege that lies ahead: I have deconstructed and disembodied the words of renowned scholars, and I have interleaved them within intertextual poesis. Your agency is, of course, up to you—read with movement, read with anonymity, and, if you really need names and dates to go with the words, a scriptural map is located at the end of this act...

A Textual Journey Through A Paradigm Shift

If you admit the pleasure-giving Muse, whether in lyric or epic poetry, pleasure and pain will be kings in your city instead of law or the thing that everyone has always believed to be best, namely, reason. But in case we are charged with a certain harshness and lack of sophistication, let's also tell poetry that there is an ancient quarrel between it and philosophy [...] Nonetheless, if the poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation has any argument to bring forward that proves it ought to have a place in a well-governed city, we at least would be glad to admit it, for we are well aware of the charm that it exercises. But, be that as it may, to betray what one believes to be the truth is impious.

All crises begin with the blurring of a paradigm and the consequent loosening of the rules for normal research.

I first remember hearing the phrase “performance is a way of knowing” in graduate school. It was repeated so frequently and with such assurance that its methodological status stood without question or suspicion. We just knew it was true. We knew it in our bodies, from the daily work of performance. We knew it as we talked with one another about our performance experiences. We knew it personally when we discovered that some performances would live with us, like old friends or enemies, inscribing their images and spirits on our psyche. In other words, we knew it as sensuous beings, somatically engaged in performative events. Such knowledge resides in the ontological and is perhaps best expressed in the poetic.

Theories belong in the top drawer. They commingle, rearrange themselves, stick together, and constitute the archives of my memory. The remnants are having an orgy. They play off each other and become entwined. When the theories are all together, moving from one theory to another becomes a manner of dexterity, of swinging from one position to another.

This piece is about my performance in everyday interaction. Our interaction is a performance about alternatives to scholarly representation. Scholarship and fiction are more than related; they are those incestuous cousins.

I've long thought that teaching and learning anthropology should be more fun than they often are. Perhaps we should not merely read and comment on ethnographies, but actually perform them. Alienated students spend many tedious hours in library carrels struggling with accounts of alien lives and even more alien anthropological theories about the ordering of those lives. Whereas anthropology should be about, in D H Lawrence's phrase, "man alive" and "woman alive," this living quality frequently fails to emerge from our pedagogics, perhaps, to cite Lawrence again, because our "analysis presupposes a corpse." It is becoming increasingly recognized that the anthropological monograph is itself a rather rigid literary genre which grew out of the notion that in the human sciences reports must be modeled rather abjectly on those of the natural sciences. But such a genre has no privileged position, especially now that we realize that in social life cognitive, affective, and volitional elements are bound up with one another and are alike primary, seldom

found in their pure form, often hybridized, and only comprehensible by the investigator as lived experience, *his/hers* as well as, and in relation to, *theirs*.

The performative turn in anthropology has developed as a counterproject to logical positivism. After clearing conceptual space by challenging the ideals of a unified, value-free science, it is now staking out its own claims about “the construction and reconstruction of self and society.”

1. *Poetics*. Performance-centered research features the fabricated, invented, imagined, constructed nature of human realities. Cultures and selves are not given, they are made; even, like fictions, they are “made up.” Ethnographers are attracted to those cultural fabrications where ambiguity and artifice are most conspicuous: rituals, festivals, spectacles, dramas, narratives, metaphors, games, celebrations. These heightened, reflexive genres reveal the possibilities and limits of everyday role-playing and invention. They remind us that cultures and persons are more than just created; they are creative. They hold out the promise of reimagining and refashioning the world. Moreover, ethnographic research is likewise constructed and creative. Participant-observation research is based on artifice, and requires the willing suspension of disbelief by both parties to the encounter. Ethnographic monographs and articles derive their authority from the construction of a scholarly persona. Scholarly writing is the persuasive telling of a story about the stories one has witnessed and lived.

The movement from ethnography to performance is a process of pragmatic reflexivity. Not the reflexivity of a narcissistic isolate moving among his or her memories and dreams,

but the attempt of representatives of one generic modality of human existence, the Western historical experience, to understand “on the pulses,” in Keatsian metaphor, other modes hitherto locked away from it by cognitive chauvinism or cultural snobbery. Historically, ethnodramatics is emerging just when knowledge is being increased about other cultures, other world views, other life styles; when Westerners, endeavoring to trap non-Western philosophies, dramatics, and poetics in the corrals of their own cognitive constructions, find that they have caught sublime monsters, Eastern dragons who are lords of fructile chaos, whose wisdom makes our cognitive knowledge look somehow shrunken, shabby, and inadequate to our new apprehension of the human condition.

Ethnography’s distinctive research method, participant-observation fieldwork, privileges the body as a site of knowing. In contrast, most academic disciplines [...] have constructed a Mind/Body hierarchy of knowledge [...] so that mental abstractions and rational thought are taken as both epistemologically and morally superior to sensual experience, bodily sensations, and the passions. Indeed, the body and the flesh are linked with the irrational, unruly, and dangerous—certainly an inferior realm of experience to be controlled by the higher powers of reason and logic. [...] Nevertheless, the obligatory rite-of-passage for all ethnographers—doing fieldwork—requires getting one’s body immersed in the field for a period of time sufficient to enable one to participate inside that culture. Ethnography is an *embodied practice*; it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing.

Recognition of the bodily nature of fieldwork privileges the processes of communication that constitute the “doing” of ethnography: speaking, listening, and acting together. [...]

Trinh reminds us that interpersonal communication is grounded in sensual experience (1989, p. 121): “[S]peaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched.”

It is hard, furthermore, to separate aesthetic and performative problems from anthropological interpretations.

... isn't it just that such poetry should return from exile when it has successfully defended itself, whether in lyric or any other meter? [...] Then we'll allow its defenders, who aren't poets themselves but lovers of poetry, to speak in prose on its behalf and to show that it not only gives pleasure but is beneficial both to constitutions and to human life. Indeed, we'll listen to them graciously, for we'd certainly profit if poetry were shown to be not only pleasant but also beneficial.

To discover how scientific revolutions are effected, we shall therefore have to examine not only the impact of nature and of logic, but also the techniques of persuasive argumentation effective within the quite special groups that constitute the community of scientists.

... to argue that the poetic essay is a powerful way to render a performative experience is to question whether the scientific ideal of objectivity, impartiality, and detachment is an adequate model for writing about performance. Whether knowingly or not, performance scholars have not escaped the considerable institutional authority of positivist logics.

Despite years of direct and devastating attacks on positivism, performance scholars, like their cohorts in the other performing arts, humanities, and human sciences, seem incapable of completely dismantling the positivist apparatus. Performance research is still frequently marked by a dispassionate, third person author who proceeds with calculated neutrality as if the descriptive task before him or her is not problematic. But, of course, it is problematic.

In 1960 Wallace Bacon published “The Dangerous Shores: From Elocution to Interpretation” — a meta-disciplinary essay that directed as much as it reflected the professional agenda of interpretation at that watershed moment of its history. The power of Bacon’s text comes from the forcefulness of his arguments to situate interpretation betwixt and between issues of *text* and *performance*, and to resist polarization. [...]

Bacon’s “The Dangerous Shores” essay achieved widespread influence because it engagingly confronted the compelling debates and controversies of its day, clearly staked out a position, and expansively charted future directions for the field. In short, it was an argument: a rhetorically effective appeal to a community of scholars about the directions of their research and teaching commitments. In a recent essay titled “From Interpretation to Performance Studies,” Bacon once again charts directions for the field at another transitional moment of its history [...]

The case presumes that the field of oral interpretation is changing (has changed) and that the newer term “performance studies” represents more than a renaming, more even than the ordinary evolution of an academic field.

I knew that Schechner set great store on what he calls the “rehearsal process,” which essentially consists of establishing a dynamic relationship, over whatever time it takes, among playscript, actors, director, stage, and props, with no initial presumptions about the primacy of any of these.

To our knowledge, Paul Campbell was the first scholar in contemporary literature to use the associated term “communication aesthetics.” His primary intent was to break the yoke of positivism which he saw as dominating the speech communication field at the time and to offer a conceptual framework for studying aesthetic communication based upon the work of such thinkers as Kenneth Burke, Susanne Langer, and Ernst Cassirer. [...]

Campbell’s impulse to include nonliterary texts and nonartistic contexts in the study of communication aesthetics is in keeping with a performance studies paradigm.

The style of ethnographic text that would challenge and excite an oral interpreter because of its complexity, depth of characterizations, tensive language, double-voiced discourse, complicated and shifting points-of-view, is exactly the kind of ethnographic writing that more honestly represents the face-to-face dynamics and contingencies of fieldwork, and thereby resists monologic and totalizing manipulations of the other.

In a deeply contradictory way, ethnographers go to great lengths to become cotemporal with others during fieldwork but then deny in writing that these others with whom they lived are their contemporaries.

In a more basic vocabulary, one could summarize the problem of definition by a fairly simple logic. A communication event may be considered to possess an aesthetic nature when any *one* of the following conditions is met: (1) The initiator(s) of the communication event *intends* it to be viewed as aesthetic. [...] (2) The performance event itself displays features generally recognized as aesthetic. [...] (3) The respondent for a communication

event willingly assumes an audience role and responds to the initiators as performers.

Given these open-ended conditions, aesthetic communication may be defined from the singular perspective of a performer, a text, or an audience, or from the interaction among all three within a given context. On one hand, such a definition seems to permit an anything-goes approach to aesthetic communication but, on the other, its conditions belie any “free-and-easy” equation of performance with everyday behavior. To satisfy one or more conditions of the definition, someone (the “performer” or the “audience”) must take *responsibility* for naming an aesthetic intent, quality, or effect.

However, if such a defense isn't made, we'll behave like people who have fallen in love with someone but who force themselves to stay away from him, because they realize that their passion isn't beneficial. [...] we are well disposed to any proof that it is the best and truest thing. But if it isn't able to produce such a defense, then, whenever we listen to it, we'll repeat the argument we have just now put forward like an incantation so as to preserve ourselves from slipping back into that childish passion for poetry which the majority of people have.

Like the choice between competing political institutions, that between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between incompatible modes of community life.

By calling upon the poetic, I discard notions of verification, reliability, and facticity for plural truths rooted in the personal. The poetic essay finds kindred spirits in the diary, the journal, the personal narrative, the confession, the autobiography, not in the objective research report, the factual history, or the statistical proof. [...] In short, the poetic essay offers a more nuanced account in keeping with the spirit of the performative event itself. The performance scholar, then, might wish to articulate what he/she knows not through the mirroring positivistic logics but through a reliance on the poetic.

I have attempted to outline some of the ways the movement toward performance studies might be considered by academics who presume themselves to be somehow aligned with this field. The basic problem is that performance studies is “about” performance in the widest possible theoretical (and definitional) sense of that term, and that most of us in the performing arts were trained to be practitioners or teachers or historians or critics (or some combination of these) within an extremely well-defined, narrow range of Western artistic performance. When Pelias and VanOosting speak of performances that “may not require specialized artistic training” in which audiences have “accountability” or “responsibility for artistic achievement,” and where “traditional critical values” or “inherited artistic values” are irrelevant, they are describing an experience alien to U.S. higher education in music, dance, film, theatre, and what some textbooks call “the art of interpretation.”

To swing between asking what I know about performance to asking what I know through performance expands my knowledge of performance. [...] Yet I find myself with one seminal, throbbing question: How is it possible to write in the fulcrum between the language of academia and the language of sex?

I am suggesting that performance studies has rendered problematic the basic definitions within which many of us have practiced what we called interpretation and theatre. As I have attempted to illustrate, the “inclusionary impulse” of performance studies accepts all definitions of *performance*—without accounting for disciplinary particularity, or the potential dissonance such inclusion entails. If the Pelias/VanOosting paradigm (or Schechner’s broad-based spectrum model) continues to dominate current discussion of

these issues, the traditional, art-based models of interpretation and theatre (which circumscribed formal educational preparation in these disciplines) become obsolete; in a sense, many of us then may be unqualified to “profess” the performance disciplines *as we understand them*.

I cruise theories. A look, a glance, a turn of the head. I walk away, pause, wait for the theory to follow. I let theories pursue me, and when I am ready, I turn to say hello, to ask, “Are you ready?”

Date: Fri, 31 Jan 1997 10:09:39 -0700 (MST)

[from] Bob Craig <[log in to unmask]>

Subject: Textual Harassment

Textual Harassment

Robert T. Craig

[...] Opening the current Text and Performance Quarterly I find a special issue on “Alternatives in Writing about Performance.” The articles look kind of interesting although not in my area. The connecting theme appears to be narcissism, as a word from the title of each article suggests: “myself,” “confessions,” “me,” “sexttext,” “performing,” “sexy,” “own.” Experimenting with new forms of ethnographic writing, the authors courageously break rules, push envelopes, go over edges. The prudes among us will be shocked, shocked by much of what they read here. [...]

I shut down my computer, walk the dog, and in due course go to bed. At 3 a.m. I suddenly awake, perspiring, my mind swirling in disconnected words and two obsessively alternating images.

One image is of a large, bright, ornate hall with dozens of youthful performers of various hues and genders all standing before full length gilded mirrors, all nude but wearing cute cowboy hats, all oiled and shapely bodies, some hairy some not, all admiring and caressing themselves.

The alternating image, on (or with) the other hand, is something out of Dickens. The ornate hall fades to a vast, dark, sooty sweatshop with dozens of prematurely aged drudges, all draped in torn dirty rags, indistinguishable, hunched over loudly clanging machines from which emerge box after identical grey box in endless series.

Again and again, from dicks to Dickens, it's damn dispiriting. Why am I so harassed and finally so depressed by these images?

But wait -- it gets worse! Imagine this: Comes the revolution in our discipline and the new regime dic-tates that henceforth this special issue of _Text..._ will set the standard for all communication scholarship. The rules will change. Only experiments in autoethnography will count towards promotion and tenure. Our uniform will be cowboy hats. The sweatshop will retool. Every issue of _...Reports_ will arrive filled with pointless pictures, bad poetry, and tedious bits of pornographic fiction....

THIS is the nightmare that startled me from my sleep at 3 a.m. this morning and drove me back to my computer to craft this little fictional piece.

Where should I send it?

--Bob Craig

University of Colorado at Boulder

I placed one foot in the sink and Raul slipped the razor in between my legs. I felt the blade on my balls, riding through the shaving cream, tingling each new opening.

Performance studies is problematic, for Wendt, because it promotes “an increasing pluralism.” Such arguments for disciplinary singularity are uncomfortably close to the cultural purity arguments used to exclude and control immigrants: diversity is linked causally to anarchy and the fragmentation and dissolution of shared norms. [...] Perhaps the real objection to diversity is not a fear of “otherness” but a fear of becoming “obsolete” within a dynamic discipline: “the formal educational training many of us possess may not be adequate to the demands implicit in an expanded, multi-disciplinary notion of ‘performance’.” I can think of no viable discipline in which one’s graduate school training provides life-time security for intellectual currency. [...] Instead of despair, the incredible vitality and challenge of rapidly expanding conceptual frontiers should instill humility, and a decent modesty about what we know.

I want to textualize the ephemeral nature of desire in the context of gay-male pornography, and I want to write from the inside as well as the outside. I want to undress performance from a critical perspective and let it stand nude as a body of performative knowledge. For guidance, I swing not into theories of gay porn, but to Roland Barthes and his discourse on bliss and desire.

In my own narrative, this begins to sound like an unambiguous triumph for the progressive Performance Studies Division: a victory for the “radical” faction, the scholars “mostly for ‘Sextext,’” over the voices of “authority,” the scholars “mostly against” it (Kellett and Goodall 1998, 164). Yet let me interject a note of doubt. [...] In urging my colleagues to be on guard against taking our seriousness too seriously [...] I would add that scandals like this are *utile*, if not particularly *dulce*, and more common than we seem to remember.

Date: Fri, 31 Jan 1997 16:39:58 -0500 (EST)

[from] “Carolyn Ellis (Com/Soc)” <[\[log in to unmask\]](#)>

Subject: Re: CRTNET 1681: Keep Working on It

Dear Bob, I don’t know if it’ll make you happy or sad to know that there are numerous places to send your clever piece, although most will demand more work before publishing it. Writing good experimental autoethnography is not easy. There are “rigorous” standards of narrative truth and literary writing to follow. But it’s clear that this piece is a promising

beginning for you. Of course, if your piece gets published, it may contribute to your “nightmare.”

Since the meaning of your piece is in readers’ response, I must tell you that I found it clever, funny, and courageous. I will not forget it. It also made me smile to think that autoethnographic writing could elicit such a story from you, which is, of course, part of its power.

If you decide to work on this story, let me know and I’ll suggest places you might want to send it. However, if you decide to turn it into traditional social science commentary, the usual outlets will apply. And if you’re just having fun and getting us ALL to laugh at ourselves--it worked for me. And if you wrote it as a putdown, you failed miserably because your story was written so well and cleverly that it demonstrated well the evocative nature of autoethnography.

Thanks.

Carolyn S. Ellis, Professor of Communication and Sociology,
Department of Communication, University of South Florida,
4202 E. Fowler Ave., CIS 1040, Tampa, Fl. 33620

4-APR-1995 17:53:58.42

Just joined, after having attended the Performance Studies Conference at NYU. [...] There are very few schools in the position of NYU/NU at the moment. I am trying, at the

University of Massachusetts to begin a performance studies program with the Five Colleges [University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Smith, Mt. Holyoke, and Hampshire], but it is still at a very early discussion stage. [...] In some ways, having a Performance Studies Association helps by “legitimizing” the discipline. We can point to it, show it exists, lobby to have it ourselves. On the other hand, this also means PSA would serve, inevitably, as kind of credentialling function that needs to be thought through very carefully. What kind of institution do we want for a field that defines itself as “nomadic”? [...]

Jenny Spencer

jspencer@english.umass.edu

The turn to the poetic, as Adrienne Rich suggests, is not “a philosophical or psychological blueprint; it’s an instrument for embodied experience.” [...] the poetic essay seeks a different standard for presenting the performance event on the page. In other words, if the poetic essay stands as a mode for rendering performance, what might constitute an acceptable and authoritative account? Four criteria suggest themselves: coherence, plausibility, imagination, and empathy.

A coherent poetic essay holds together, gels in an intelligible and articulate manner. Its parts seem to coalesce, to become intertwined, to find relationships with one another. The parts may settle into a seeming unity or may shatter into a disjunctive array. In either case, the parts insist upon some association that yokes them together. As the parts come together in their harmonious and inharmonious combinations, the essay finds its voice, a voice that often cannot be contained within a single speaker.

A plausible poetic essay appears credible. It pulls together a believable combination of the parts. Like a good story, it offers a convincing narrative. It stands as a version, an interpretation among many that appears reasonable to accept. It seeks an internal logic, one that may be filled with ambiguity, tension, and contradictions. Held against the external world, it may echo or challenge everyday understandings. Its account, then, is a temporary diagnosis. It illustrates the possible.

The imaginative poetic essay is literary. It calls upon traditional aesthetic standards, those questioned by literary critics and relied upon by creative writers. It privileges the sensuous, the figurative, the expressive. It calls for an aesthetic transaction, an encounter between the writer and the reader. It demands engagement. Like good phenomenology, it presents through reflection and imaginative free variation the complexity and richness of its subject.

The empathic poetic essay is marked by respect. It strives to feel with others, to understand what others see. It works for a generosity of spirit that creates space for others. It invites dialogue. It is an open invitation for speech, a desire to hear others. The empathic essay, then, privileges an ethics of fairness, sensitive to the ideological consequences of its own discourse and aware that an empathic gesture cannot become a substitute for political action.

... we'll repeat the argument we have just now put forward like an incantation so as to preserve ourselves from slipping back into that childish passion for poetry which the majority of people have. And we'll go on chanting that such poetry is not to be taken seriously or treated as a serious undertaking with some kind of hold on the truth, but that anyone who is anxious about the constitution within him must be careful when he hears it and must continue to believe what we have said about it.

As in political revolutions, so in paradigm choice—there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community.

I turn to the poetic with the hope that I might pursue both the possibilities of disappearance and the power of presence. Instead of writing a work that hits hard, that is straight to the point, that is based on well-formulated arguments, carefully arranged to leave no room for doubt; instead of crippling my critics, recruiting new members and eliciting new allegiances; instead of being armed, ready for a good fight, ready to enjoy the bounty of conquest, I want to write in another shape. I seek a space that unfolds softly, one that circles around, slides between, swallows whole. I want to live in feelings that are elusive, to live in doubt. I want to offer an open hand that refuses to point but is unwilling to allow injustices to slip through its fingers. I want to be here for the taking, a small figure against the academic wall.

I had a fling with poststructuralism in an attempt to believe that academic writing, like pornographic writing, is an explosion of desire. I was convinced that my dissertation committee never would have accepted my argument. Academic discourse is revolutionary. A statistical formula on the course of failure is an opportunity for a flash of insight, a sudden sensation far more erotic than a casual orgasm. Poststructuralists fantasize over language, how words can be turned in upon themselves through a simple, well-placed slash (read: s/lash). Poststructuralists are sadomasochists at heart. They get off on the violence they do to language and the violence language returns. A dash here, slash there, hyphen to follow, erotic, all of it is erotic.

8-APR-1995 11:49:07.71

I'm having a great deal of difficulty distinguishing what the difference is between performative writing and writing in a personal, narrative voice—writing that is personally invested, in which the stakes of one's investments are self-conscious, writing that uses the first person even in heavily theoretical arguments and discussions—in other words, the kind of writing that in many circles has simply come to be seen as “good writing,” interesting writing. Is it simply a rhetorical style that anyone can master, and that is starting to be more valued in the academy (I would venture to say after decades of feminist critical writing of various kinds)? I'm all for it, but I don't see the specific connection to performance studies. [...]

Jenny Spencer

jspencer@english.umass.edu

White (guilty), middle-class (guilty), divorced (guilty) man (guilty) seeks same (guilty) for long-term relationship without guilt.

10-APR-1995 08:32:32.06

I agree with Jill—there is a sense in which performative writing attempts to hold back onto the loss.... maybe that's where it differs from "writing that is personally invested" (in response to Jenny). Performative writing tries to hold onto itself as a moment? It doesn't recognise itself (or at least fights against itself) as being a constant revision by it's readers—it returns the author-persona to the centre of the text in a new, different ways (a post-Barthes/post-poststructuralist way?). It demands a different way of reading, responding and revising: it holds itself IN THE MOMENT IT WAS COMMUNICATED; it makes no claims to *authenticity*, *timelessness*, or *autonomy* (in this way, I tend to think of it as being set against the conventions of traditional whitemale academic writing—perhaps that's why it seems to crop up mainly around feminist discourses? I don't know).

I think as importantly as anything else, one of the prime features of performative writing is this idea of the text having a sense of itself: that's sounding awfully like abstract spiritualist bullshit... anybody get what I mean???

Dan Pinchbeck

D.Pinchbeck@uea.ac.uk

Date: Fri, 31 Jan 1997 15:20:02 -0800 (PST)

[from] Malcolm Parks <[log in to unmask]>

Subject: Textual Harrassment and its Defenders

Although I found a couple of the articles in the recent TPQ to be valuable, I share Prof. Craig's concerns about where such work takes us as a discipline. Certainly some of the work is downright embarrassing. The most revealing thing, however, was comment made by one writer in response to Prof. Craig's concerns. She maintained that Craig's post actually demonstrated the value of autoethnography because it was "evocative."

I agree - autoethnography is evocative. But sadly that's about all it is. And that's why its not scholarship. It may be a lot of other things, but it ain't scholarship. And the fact that there is now a critical mass of self-reinforcing devotees to this drivel who can be called upon to defend it doesn't make it scholarship either. Enough. Scholarship must involve something more than the mere ability to evoke a feeling or response. Stepping on a piece of broken glass will do that.

Malcolm (Mac) Parks [log in to unmask]

University of Washington

Honor Cultural Diversity: Attend Both Opera & Hockey

On the night Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated, I had gone to the New Orleans Athletic Club for a workout and a massage. When it was time for my rubdown, I got my usual man, Hank. Hank is a big man, strong. He was headed to college on a football scholarship until he ripped up his knee. “Good evening, Hank. How are you tonight?” I said. “Fine, sir. I’m doing’ fine. You just set yourself right down here, sir,” Hank answered, sounding not quite himself.

I was ready for Hank’s powerful hands to take away the stress from the office. He could work each muscle until you felt like a new man. He began as usual but soon started beating my back to the rhythm of his mumblings:

“They had no right (whop).

They had no right (whop).

He was a good man (whop).

Dr. Martin Luther King (whop).

He was king (whop).”

His rhythm increased, his blows became harder, his speech clearer. I was, I must admit, getting scared.

“To shoot that man down, (wham), my man down (wham).

It’s just not right, (wham), just not right (wham).”

“Hank,” I said, “I think that’s all I need for tonight.”

“But I’m not finished yet, sir,” he answered, placing his large hand in the middle of my back to hold me in place.

“No, I’m not (whack) finished yet (whack).

I'm not (whack) finished yet (whack)."

Well, as far as I was concerned, he was finished. The next day I called, explained what happened, and got him fired.

A beefy Japanese guy was talking to a fireman who just finished putting out a small fire next door. The dialogue ran a banal course—"You look really hot," and "I need a rinse"—when suddenly, the fireman, a cute Swede with a Roman nose, touched the Japanese guy on the chest. I was trying to focus on the racial discourse of the scene but found myself feeling reorganized, stimulated, aroused. I was starting to bulge. "Come on," the director said, "you wanna act?" Participant/observation was not the research method I had in mind, but not being a slave to any one methodological camp, I went with the flow. Thus began my career in pornography.

First, writers of the poetic essay risk the appearance of self-indulgence. They may seem unbridled as they attempt to pull personal experience into the scholarly equation. In short, self-consciousness may lead to self-absorption. They may fail to land, as Trinh Minh-ha describes, on the "narrow and slippery ground" between the "twin chasms of navel-gazing and navel-erasing." Second, writers of the poetic essay risk accusations of irrelevance, since they may work without reference to previous scholarly endeavors. In the attempt to achieve the poetic, traditional procedures, such as reviewing the literature, citing sources, and building bibliographies, may be left behind. In such cases, readers may have difficulty placing the work in its scholarly context. Third, writers of poetic essays also risk the charge of irrelevance because they seldom specify how their contributions add to the

ongoing knowledge within the field. It is common in the traditional essay for a writer to first identify what has been done on a given topic and then to articulate how his/her essay will explore new terrain. Such markings are typically not done in the poetic essay, since to do so would be an acceptance of the positivist presupposition that knowledge is progressive, always moving toward a goal of obtaining the complete truth. This assumption is one that writers of the poetic essay would reject.

Date: Fri, 07 Feb 1997 16:00:05 -0600

[from] Ted Wendt <[log in to unmask]>

Organization: Murray State University

Subject: Confessions of a Long-Time TPQ Reader

CONFESSIONS OF A LONG-TIME TPQ READER

Intro: A Brief History

Before TPQ there was *Literature In Performance,* and before that there was “only” QJS, *Speech Monographs,* etc. That’s what people in Interpretation said: “only.” The typical complaint of the time went something like this: “None of the major SCA publications will publish us. Their editorial boards are biased. We need our own journal, so that important Interpretation articles will get into print, and we’ll get lines on our vitae, and we won’t be departmental 2nd-class citizens.” Keep in mind who “we” was, or rather, wasn’t. It wasn’t Don Geiger, or Wallace Bacon, or Lilla

Heston, or Lee Roloff, or Tom Sloan, or Virginia Floyd, etc. These people published regularly in the existing SCA journals. But, apparently, there was a HUGE amount of potential, very important, material out there that “we” just couldn’t get published. SCA authorized the establishment of another journal. And raised its annual membership dues. Flash forward to:

Chapter I: Vol. 17, No. 1 of TPQ (January, 1997)

A random sampling from the epitome of “Performance Studies” scholarship:

1) An eight-page article devoted to stagefright; oops, sorry: “performance apprehension.” No “scholarship,” you understand--just “personal narrative” or “autoethnography.” AKA: talking to yourself.

[...]

3) An eight-page photographic essay. The TPQ Editorial Policy statement tells us that TPQ intends to “publish scholarship . . . [which] advance[s] the understanding of performance. . . .” Sorry, not much advancement here.

4) An eleven page “fictional essay” devoted to a curious mixture of admittedly gay pornography and out-of-context “borrowings” from the work of that darling of the post-modernists, Roland Barthes. It could have been Foucault, of course, but he is SO overdone these days. Barthes is ever so retro. More on this article later.

[...]

Chapter III: What DOES That TPQ Line On Your Vita Signify?

I'm trying to imagine how all the people who have ever written for TPQ feel about "Sextext." Many, of course, will embrace its position (sorry, it's almost impossible to avoid such language). Some will defend it from the "high ground" of the First Amendment or Academic Freedom. But some . . . Imagine conversations with colleagues from related fields, the Department Chair, members of the Personnel Committee. "Yeah, I published in TPQ. Of course, my article wasn't sexually explicit. I only engage in serious scholarship. [...] But I am contemplating an article in which I will explore the intertextuality of masturbation fantasy texts and their praxis. . . ."

Chapter IV: No, Senator, We Aren't Wasting Taxpayer Dollars

I spend a lot of my time explaining to various "publics" that art exhibited in our university's gallery is NOT pornography, that plays we produce in our university's theatre use nudity and profanity for artistic ends, that modern dance and music DOES have artistic value and a "point."

[...]

Ever since Plato, we've attempted to explain that the Utility vs. Non-utility argument is a false dichotomy, and that there is "value" to engaging in art and various intellectual activities for their own sake. As we all know, there are many people both inside and outside of academe who think of universities as glorified trade schools. Those of us who

hope to keep the “vocationalists” at bay are ill-served by those colleagues who--desiring to assert their political “rights”--insist on providing state legislators with just the ammunition they need to target (what they would call) our triviality, our irrelevance, our anarchy.

Chapter V: Better Than Kryptonite

Anyone presuming to have an opinion about “Sextext” (this author included) needs to be prepared for a deluge of **ad hominem** attacks. Has anyone noticed how post-modern ideologues wrap themselves in a protective cocoon of politically-correct defenses, designed to pre-empt criticism? Thus, “Sextext” is a self-styled **fiction.** It is convoluted, irrational, poorly-written, derivative, and disorganized because it is **post-modern theory.** Its personae are Gay, Gay, Gay. It appropriates Barthes and Foucault. It is, therefore, unassailable. It is critically untouchable. Those foolish enough to offer an opinion (just ask Prof. Burleson) will be branded as McCarthy-ites. Or--the greatest mortal sin of our age--homophobes. Censorious blue-nose reactionaries. And the very best defense of all? “Sextext” is **scholarship,** published in one of the principal publications of a large, if not universally-respected, professional organization. (Need I remind anyone of the dismissive way SCA has been treated by the Council of Learned Societies? Gee, I wonder if they read TPQ?)

[...]

Is free expression a “right”? You bet it is. Is pornography protected under the umbrella of free expression. Yep. Is pornography scholarship? Well, that seems to

depend on your politics. If you are a feminist, then heterosexual pornography is not--and probably not even deserving of First Amendment protections. But TPQ, it seems, is prepared to champion a double standard. Does their editorial board have a "right" to publish gay pornography? Yes, but SCA members should ask themselves what they're paying for. Scholarship? I don't think so.

Ted A. Wendt

Murray State University

When I found out I could make more collecting social security than working for them, I quit. They were surprised. I guess they thought I liked getting on that bus every day to go raise their kids and clean their toilets. "Freddie," they said—my name is Fredricca, but they called me Freddie—"How can you leave us? This place just won't be the same without you."

"Well, you'll find another girl," I answered. "I'm getting old. I can't do what I once did." They accepted that as a simple statement from an old woman. But it was more. They'd find another girl like they'd find another vacuum if the old one broke. I was nothing but equipment to them, and they were nothing but a check to me. We all pretended to have, within strict bounds of course, this affection for one another. What I couldn't do was pretend anymore. Twenty-two years is enough. I could still do the work, but I didn't like those people, and they only liked me for what I could do for them. I was their maid, their servant, their nigger.

Those twenty-two years are too hard to forget. I remember what it was like to get those handouts for my children, those toys and clothes soiled with their use. They thought I'd be so grateful to get their trash. I took those things because I was too poor to make any other choice. But I hated myself searching through their garbage. I remember hearing those children I raised calling me "nigger" when I had to correct them and their mother saying they didn't mean any harm by it. Well, harm was done. I never forgot what was always just under the surface. I remember when my child had pneumonia. I had to leave him in order to take care of their child with the sniffles. "Freddie, we need you," they said. They needed me to keep all bother from their lives, to keep their lives dust free. I remember when my husband died and they asked if they would be safe if they came to the funeral.

As I sit here rocking, I guess I remember too much. But I'm going to rock until I can rock away the memories like a momma rocks away a baby's tears. I'm going to rock for all the years I gave them. I'm going to rock for the shame of it all. I'm going to rock until I sleep.

If you admit the pleasure-giving Muse, whether in lyric or epic poetry, pleasure and pain will be kings in your city instead of law or the thing that everyone has always believed to be best, namely, reason. But in case we are charged with a certain harshness and lack of sophistication, let's also tell poetry that there is an ancient quarrel between it and philosophy [...] Nonetheless, if the poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation has any argument to bring forward that proves it ought to have a place in a well-governed city, we at least would be glad to admit it, for we are well aware of the charm that it exercises. But, be that as it may, to betray what one believes to be the truth is impious.

All crises begin with the blurring of a paradigm and the consequent loosening of the rules for normal research.

I first remember hearing the phrase “performance is a way of knowing” in graduate school. It was repeated so frequently and with such assurance that its methodological status stood without question or suspicion. We just knew it was true. We knew it in our bodies, from the daily work of performance. We knew it as we talked with one another about our performance experiences. We knew it personally when we discovered that some performances would live with us, like old friends or enemies, inscribing their images and spirits on our psyche. In other words, we knew it as sensuous beings, somatically engaged in performative events. Such knowledge resides in the ontological and is perhaps best expressed in the poetic.

A Scriptural Map

or ... “why is it that you need to ask my name?” [Genesis 32:29]

“If you admit the pleasure-giving Muse...”	: Plato, <i>The Republic</i> , 607a-c
“All crises begin with ...”	: Kuhn, 1962, p. 84
“I first remember hearing the phrase ...”	: Pelias, 1999, p. ix
<hr/>	
“Theories belong in the top drawer. ...”	: Corey & Nakayama, 1997, p. 58
“This piece is about ...”	: Pelias, 1999, p. 7
“I’ve long thought that teaching ...”	: Turner, 1979, p. 80
“The performative turn in anthropology ...”	: Conquergood, 1989, p. 83
“The movement from ethnography ...”	: Turner, 1979, p. 92
“Ethnography’s distinctive research ...”	: Conquergood, 1991, p. 180
“Recognition of the bodily nature ...”	: Conquergood, 1991, p. 181
“It is hard, furthermore, to separate ...”	: Turner, 1979, p. 90
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“... isn’t it just that such poetry ...”	: Plato, <i>The Republic</i> , 607d-e
“To discover how scientific revolutions ...”	: Kuhn, 1962, p. 94
“... to argue that the poetic essay is ...”	: Pelias, 1999, p. x
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“In 1960 Wallace Bacon published ...”	: Conquergood, 1990, p. 256
“The case presumes that the field ...”	: Pelias & VanOosting, 1987, p. 219
“I knew that Schechner set great store ...”	: Turner, 1979, p. 84
“To our knowledge, Paul Campbell was ...”	: Pelias & VanOosting, 1987, p. 220
“The style of ethnographic text ...”	: Conquergood, 1989, p. 87
“In a deeply contradictory way, ...”	: Conquergood, 1991, p. 182-183
“In a more basic vocabulary, one could ...”	: Pelias & VanOosting, 1987, p. 221
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“However, if such a defense isn’t made, ...”	: Plato 608
“Like the choice between competing ...”	: Kuhn, p. 94
“By calling upon the poetic, I discard ...”	: Pelias, p. xi
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“I have attempted to outline some ...”	: Wendt, 1990, p. 255
“To swing between asking what I know ...”	: Corey & Nakayama, 1997, p. 58
“I am suggesting that performance studies ...”	: Wendt, 1990, p. 253
“I cruise theories. A look, a glance, a turn ...”	: Corey & Nakayama, 1997, p. 58
Textual Harassment	: Craig, 1997
“I placed one foot in the sink and Raul ...”	: Corey & Nakayama, 1997, p. 59
“Performance studies is problematic, for ...”	: Conquergood, 1990, p. 258
“I want to textualize the ephemeral nature of ...”	: Corey & Nakayama, 1997, p. 59
“In my own narrative, this begins to sound ...”	: Edwards, 1999, p. 38
Re: CRTNET 1681: Keep Working on It	: Ellis, 1997
“Just joined, after having attended the ...”	: Spencer, 4-APR (Schechner, 1995, p. 156)
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“The turn to the poetic, as Adrienne Rich ...”	: Pelias, 1999, p. xiii
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“... we’ll repeat the argument we have just ...”	: Plato, <i>The Republic</i> , 608
“As in political revolutions, so in ...”	: Kuhn, p. 94
“I turn to the poetic with the hope that ...”	: Pelias, 1999, p. xi

“I had a fling with poststructuralism ...”	: Corey & Nakayama, 1997, p. 65
“I’m having a great deal of difficulty ...”	: Spencer, 8-APR (Schechner, 1995, p. 158)
“White (guilty), middle-class (guilty), ...”	: Pelias, 1999, p. 35
“I agree with Jill—there is a sense in ...”	: Pinchbeck, 10-APR (Schechner, 1995, p. 159)
Textual Harrassment and its Defenders	: Parks, 1997
“On the night Dr. Martin Luther King was ...”	: Pelias, 1999, p. 35-36
“A beefy Japanese guy was talking to ...”	: Corey & Nakayama, 1997, p. 60
“First, writers of the poetic essay risk ...”	: Pelias, 1999, p. xiv
Confessions of a Long-Time TPQ Reader	: Wendt, 1997
“When I found out I could make more ...”	: Pelias, 1999, p. 37-38

“If you admit the pleasure-giving Muse...”	: Plato, <i>The Republic</i> , 607a-c
“All crises begin with ...”	: Kuhn, 1962, p. 84
“I first remember hearing the phrase ...”	: Pelias, 1999, p. ix

ACT V
PERFORMING ENGLISH

Look at this body, this brown and bearded body, this somewhat good-looking body, this nomadic body that seeks to belong ‘here’ even as it betrays an always shifting past and present. Look at this somewhat pretentious body, clothed in these various layers of privilege and occupying these various positions. Look at this somewhat treacherous body, always revealing or hiding multiple positions that may offend you just when you may be somewhat comfortable getting to know this body.

Look at how this body pretends its name matters. It demands to be known by its recently-acquired and recently-legalized full name: hari stephen kumar. It pretends that its name might signal something to you before it arrives, some clue or warning that this body carries traces of unspeakably unsatisfying subaltern itineraries, as Spivak (1988/2006) might say. Feel how this body evades questioning of origins, feel how this body dances so quickly to routes instead of roots, as Hall (2009) might say. Move with this body, if you will, following Conquergood (1998) and de Certeau (1980/1984), as it seeks an always moving co-performance of nomads enacting tactical subversions within and against strategic spaces, always leaving and arriving simultaneously.

When it does arrive, either on the phone or in person, listen and feel how this body speaks such good English with you. It pretends that its performance of English rivals or surpasses the performance of ‘native’ speakers. Indeed, this body is somewhat arrogant in its pretensions and its privileged positions. This body has a Master’s degree in science and a previous life as an engineer; this body is currently finishing a Master’s

degree in Communication; and this body is now a doctoral candidate in English, where it is preparing for a lifetime of teaching English professionally in the Academy. This body has tasted the English of so-called ‘native’ speakers and is not impressed by their performances. In a world of many englishes, as Canagarajah (2006) and others have said, this body seeks to trouble English natives.

Some people say to this body—“wow, you don’t have an accent!”

This body used to say: “Thanks!”

If you are speaking ‘standard American’ english, this body now says: “But I do have an accent—yours!”

This body is now saying: What accent did you expect before I opened my mouth?

Some people say to this body—“wow, your English is so good!”

This body used to say: “Thanks!”

This body now says, without qualifications: “Thanks... and so is yours!”

This body is now saying: English is my first language.

Why does this body make such a claim? Why does this particular, marked, postcolonial body stake such a colonizing claim on a colonial language that has already claimed the worlds this body has lived and felt? Why does this body insist on colonizing itself with American English and thereby betraying its ethnic mother tongue—that crucial third rail of multiculturalism?

Here is my uncle. And here I am, maybe 12 or 13 years old. We are in Yemen, where my uncle is working as a secretary in a factory. He has just finished telling me a story about when he joined the Indian Army, some years after his sister married my father. In his story he was a supply clerk for the Army, and he told me about this other supply clerk who gave him a hard time about his bad English. My uncle has just finished telling me his clever response: *Naa avankitta sonne, “Why English? English is not my mother tongue. It may be your mother tongue, but not mine!”* My uncle is grinning at me as he then says the following word, relishing it, drawing it out, loudly and clearly and slowly saying: *“Bastard.”*

Do you get it? I didn’t get it, my uncle had to explain to me that by saying English “may be your mother tongue but not mine”, my uncle had insinuated that the other supply clerk may be an illegitimate child of an English father—the product of a colonial rape. To be Indian and to desire to speak English, in my uncle’s view, was to be illegitimate. So here is my uncle now, as I tell you this, as I tell you that I claim English as my first language, because I wonder if he would call me a bastard—you know?

So here is my mother. I am not in this scene, as this is happening before I was born and shortly after my mother married my father. She has just been called “an illiterate woman” by my grandfather, my father’s father, her father-in-law. She is in shock, I imagine. At least that’s how she sometimes tells the story to me. She has a Master’s degree in Economics, while my father did not finish engineering school. But she does not

speak English—she studied in Tamil. She is from Kerala, her parents moved to Madras before she was born, so she describes herself as “born and brought up” in Madras. Her parents speak Malayalam, but my mother speaks Tamil, has fallen in love with Tamil, is a Tamil fanatic, writes exquisitely patriotic Tamil poetry, has participated in student protests against Hindi when the Indian government moved to establish English and Hindi as its two official languages in the 1960s. She has done all this but at this moment, in this scene, here, she is called “illiterate” by her new father-in-law.

I am in this scene some years later, as a young boy, maybe 4 or 5 years old. Here is my mother again, we are in a small town in North India, where my father is working at a factory. I am trying to read the English newspaper. My mother is trying to get me to say “banana”—but I keep saying “banananana”. Suddenly my mother starts crying. I am confused. She stumbles over the word “banana” herself as she teaches me how to write it first, and then to say it. She is teaching me English as the first language I learn to read and write. She wants me to read the English newspaper to my grandfather next time we visit. She tells me that my grandfather would be proud. I don’t question until many years later just who she hoped my grandfather would be proud of. I wonder if she is crying in this scene because she is aching to teach me the wonderful Tamil word for ‘banana’—a word that involves slippery pronunciation for children to learn and hence a word that leads to unspeakable cuteness to be enjoyed by parents.

So here is my grandfather. I am not in this scene, and, strictly speaking, neither is my grandfather, because this is a letter from him to me. Well, it is actually a letter written

to my father, one of my grandfather's monthly missives. My parents and I are living in Yemen, where my father found a job that helped him escape India's unemployment crisis in the 1980s, but my grandfather still sends us letters by Airmail. The letters arrive on blue paper, words flowing across the page from a firm hand writing with a fountain pen. It's in English—the command and tone unmistakably British, the presence and authority unmistakably my grandfather's. My grandfather has retired from a lifetime of working as a clerk at a British company's office in Madras, but he still writes eloquently in British standard English. It was his ticket to employment with the British in the early 1920s, before India's Independence, when he left his village in rural South India to go to Madras seeking a job. In his letters he always tells me the same thing: to read well at school and to write well to him.

And here I am, about 16 years old. We are sitting in my grandfather's house. I have come home from wandering around Madras, and I have brought home a newspaper. My grandfather is a voracious reader but has cataracts and reads with great difficulty. I sit next to him and tell him: "Thatha, paper padikkata?" His face lights up, he gestures to me and leans back, closes his tired eyes. I start reading, word by word, slowly. The Tamil newspaper is hard for me to read, as I have just begun learning to read and write Tamil, picking it up from reading signs on buses and shop windows. But my grandfather loves it when I read Tamil to him. He whispers help for me when I run into difficult words—I cannot read beyond a third-grade vocabulary. He smiles when I finish and says, in English, "Tamil is a divine language."

So here is my school in Yemen. It is an international school—it was built through a USAID program in the 1970s and is now owned by the group of families that own the factory where my father works. It is a school built to teach a Western curriculum, but it is a school located in a small mountain town, far from the country's capital city. There are very few foreigners in this town. The school is privately owned and expensive, making it accessible only to those parents who are in the upper echelons of the small town's society. This means those in high-ranking Army positions, or those who own prosperous businesses. Most of the student bodies in this school are Yemeni children from these upper classes—and the few foreign children of the foreign workers like my father, who work in factories owned by some of the Yemeni children's parents. Half of the curriculum is taught in Arabic: History (Middle-Eastern), Geography, Social Studies, Religion (Islam), and Language (Arabic). The other half is taught in English: Math, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and English. Half of the teachers are Arabic-speaking bodies from around the world, mostly from Egypt and Sudan and the Gulf states. The other half are English-speaking bodies from around the world, mostly from Europe, Australia, India, and America. All the Indian teachers taught the sciences. There was the occasional European or Australian body that would teach a science subject for a year or two, but the long-term Biology teacher was Indian, as was his wife who taught Physics. All the bodies that taught English were American. Few of them stayed longer than a year, none of them stayed longer than two years.

Here I am, about 10 years old. I am being kicked down the hallway by Arabic-speaking bullies, who are taunting me in Arabic for, among many other things, being a

pagan idol worshipper. I understand their words and taunts because they have also been teaching me Arabic, hoping, among many other things, to convert me to Islam.

And here I am again, about 14 years old, in those same hallways. The Test of English as a Foreign Language is coming up—we all have to take the exam in order to graduate from this elite international school. We also have to take the SATs—but students for whom English is a Foreign Language are exempt from having to do well on the Verbal portion of the SATs. I have been preparing to do well on the SAT Verbal, having taken the TOEFL twice already and having scored inordinately high both times. So here I am, about to take the TOEFL for the third time, with two of the bullies who had tormented me before. They have asked me to tutor them in English as they prepare to take the TOEFL for the first time. So here they are, two light brown bodies striving to learn English from a dark brown body in a hallway around the corner from a room filled with internationally privileged white bodies.

This is the longest time I have talked with these two bodies, and one of them suddenly asks me why I don't have an Indian accent. I shrug, which reminds the other one of a joke involving an Indian couple who are supposedly at a party when the man is asked how old he is. The brown Yemeni body in front of me pretends to have a thick Indian accent as he performs the joke's punchline: "Oh, I am dirty, and my wife is dirty too!" They laugh, and when I don't laugh along, the other brown Yemeni body says, loudly, to explain the point to me: "Thirty! And Thirty Two!"

So here I am in college, in India, in Madras. I have just arrived here from Arizona, where I spent two years as an undergrad based on my high SATs. I was visiting home, in Yemen, for vacation when civil war broke out in Yemen, so my family and I have relocated as refugees to our native land of India, but we don't have a home here. I am about 16 years old and I am trying to live with my grandparents. I am afraid of being hazed in college in India, so I have been learning Tamil to fit in better. I have memorized the lines from a popular song in a recent Tamil movie, a ground-breaking rap-style number involving several slang words meant to evoke slumlife. Here I am in college, now, surrounded by several other Indian students all of whom speak Tamil, and here I am performing the song:

... hey sarayam kavvadu/thundubeedi vavalu/kudusa/kuprathotti pakkathille tea kadda ...

Everyone is laughing at the spectacle of a brown upper-middle-class foreigner from America rapping about the streets of Madras. When I am done, someone asks me a question in English. I reply in Tamil. Someone else asks me again in English. Suddenly worried that my Tamil isn't good enough, I reply again, carefully enunciating my Tamil. They laugh, and a Tamil-speaking brown body says, "Hey, machan, you are speaking Tamil like a villager da—be cool mama, we speak English da!"

So here I am in graduate school the second time around. Claudio is here too, but this is happening almost two years ago, when Claudio and I were invited to speak to students in a writing class. Claudio asks me to go first, and so I speak about public

speaking—I start with an Indian accent, and then I switch halfway through to an American accent. I am making a point about how the body is always already speaking, before we even say any words, and how particular bodies carry expectations of accents. Claudio speaks after me—he starts by saying that his English is bad and he tells students not to expect that he is going to switch his accent to good English like me, because he can't. I am ashamed of my flaunting of privileged English, here in a New England rife with colonial white privilege.

Later I apologize to Claudio—he tells me it's no big deal, but Claudio is like that, a retired thug who is quick to embrace everyone in that big hug of his. His English is Bad, he says, but his friend Marcelo chimes in to add that Claudio's Portuguese is even worse.

And here I am in graduate school the first time around. It is sometime in 1998, and I am in a room with about 80 other Indian graduate students. We have just had our first elections to establish Boston University's first Indian Graduate Student Association. BU has a vibrant Indian Student Association, but the graduate students at BU are from India, while the Indian undergraduate students at BU are Indian-Americans, born and brought up in America. The Indian graduate students have a derogatory name for the Indian undergraduates: ABCD: American-Born-Confused-Desi. Indian graduate students have been amused by the antics of Indian undergraduates who have been trying to stage cultural performances pretending to be Indian. So a group of Indian graduate students decided to form an association reflecting the experiences of Indian expatriates. We needed to elect a board of officers—I was asked to run for Treasurer against one of the

main organizers of the association. Here is the room, the results are being announced. Some 70 votes were cast for Treasurer—I get 3 of them. The only other candidate, the winner, in the heat of the moment, makes a wisecrack about me wanting to be an ABCD more than ABCDs want to be Indian. At least, that is what I think he said—he was speaking in Hindi, a language I barely know. I feel ashamed and I leave as soon as I can escape.

Some people say to this body—“wow, your English is so good!”

This body used to say: “Thanks!”

This body now says, without qualifications: “Thanks... and so is yours!”

This body is now saying: English is my first language. It is the language I first learned to read and write. It is the only language in which I am fluent enough to use it in order to trouble the language itself, as Bryant Alexander describes, “engaging in performances (written and embodied) that seek to transform the social and cultural conditions under which I live and labor” (2005, p. 433).

Why does this particular, marked, postcolonial body turn around and lay hold of the colonial language that continues to ravish the worlds this body has lived and felt? Why does this body insist on all-too-willingly taking American English into its mouth only to trouble the illusion of some original and stable ethnic mother tongue—that crucial third rail of multiculturalism?

Here is our daughter Eliana. She is five months old. Alexis is holding her, while my mother coos and fusses all over Eliana. My mother is relishing seeing her granddaughter for the first time. She is saying many sweet things in Tamil—none of which Alexis understands and many of which go over my head. My mother turns to me and says, in Tamil, to teach Eliana Tamil. I tell her, in Tamil, that it would be like the blind leading the blind. At least, that is what I want to tell her, but I don't know the words well enough, so I stumble and say something else, something awkwardly worded about us being more comfortable teaching Eliana English. I am too afraid of my mother to tell her that English is my first language. My mother responds, in rapid English, that Tamil is my mother tongue and therefore I should teach Eliana Tamil. Alexis and I smile and don't say anything—I want to tell my mother that Eliana's mother has a tongue too, but is it my place to do so?

And here is Eliana, squealing loudly, with a wide toothless grin, reminding all of us that she has her own tongue.

ACT VI

BETRAYING PERFORMANCE

I begin with a reflection on another reflection, that of James VanOosting responding to Ronald Pelias' essay during the 1995 Otis J. Aggertt Festival on the "Future of Performance Studies." VanOosting remarked (1998) then that performance should be approached as a process "of transplanting eyes, not of exchanging lenses", i.e. that performance is a way for performers

not to see things better but to see things *differently*, literally to see the world through another's eyes. The transplantation (or transformation) inherent in performance does not necessarily yield clearer vision. Indeed, the new set of eyes a performer acquires through art may come with astigmatism, may have cataracts, may even belong to a guy named Oedipus and, characteristically, come as a real shocker when the performer tries to open them. (p. 24)

Although VanOosting framed his reflection within a view of performance as an artistic procedure distinctly different from "a pluralist's methodology," I approach the metaphors in this panel³ on "Performance is ... Metaphor as Methodological Tool" as attempts to see with transplanted eyes while heeding VanOosting's exhortation to expect that seeing with other eyes will lead to surprising and unplanned experiences. I also invoke here the visceral description of seeing with other physical eyes as a way of connecting the living body with linguistic metaphors. Metaphor involves an aesthetic experience of language that arouses, reveals, hides, hints, seduces, entraps, enrages, enamors, and engages our

³ This act was in response to a panel at the 6th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry in May 2009 at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The presentations referenced in this act were subsequently published as: Pelias, 2010; Pollock, 2010; and Hanley-Tejeda, 2010. A version of this act was also previously published (Kumar, 2010b) in *International Review of Qualitative Research* © 2010 International Institute for Qualitative Inquiry, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Reprinted with permission.

moving bodies within the worlds that we so willfully imagine, inhabit, populate and traverse.

While all of the panelists evoked dynamic metaphors that voiced both powerful hopes and critical cautions in their expressions, my reflections are oriented toward an exploration of the latter. That is, I explore those aspects of metaphor that hinted at the dangers in the unexpected and contingent nature of performance and how those dangers are framed to be lived and experienced. In particular my reflections center around the use of metaphor in the study of betraying-and-belonging as simultaneous and everyday experiences in performances of transnational postcolonial citizenship. With that orientation, therefore, within this response and reflection I focus on the presentations of Ronald Pelias (“performance is an opening”) and Della Pollock (“performance is a collision course”) and David Hanley-Tejeda’s “performance is a Hurricanado Burrito” to develop views of metaphor that raise important issues for performance studies of nomadic postmodern subjects in post-globalized and post-9/11 communities.

Ronald Pelias uses metaphor as a wonderful way of opening into multiple worlds for performative explorations: “Performance is an opening, a transitional, liminal space, where one learns, for better or worse, the heart of the social, the clash of the cultural, and the twist of the linguistic. After, one is never the same.” Pelias uses several metaphors, richly layered upon and within one another in a swirling confluence of words and images to move me in breathless and pulsating appreciation of the performative methodology of metaphor. In so doing, Pelias invokes openings through which glimmer many possible views; a variety of eyes and nervous experiences, some inviting, some foreboding, all

evocative journeys of exploration, action, contemplation, poiesis, reflection, and movement within multiple sites of performance studies.

Metaphors of motion, of journeys, of wandering, of moving through openings into and across thresholds, implicitly involve possible collisions. Della Pollock takes collisions as not only possible but indeed expected in her metaphoric exploration of performance as a collision course, that is, performance as “the *condition* of the movement of objects or points of view towards each other in such a way that, if not diverted, they will bang each other up into some kind of new form. The anticipated crash causes both wide-eyed wonder and wincing terror.” Pollock proceeds to weave several metaphors in a series of thrilling and daring maneuvers with a virtuosity that evokes both a heart-stopping wonder and a heart-pounding thrust toward exploration, carrying me forward and tugging me ahead, hanging on dearly and yet eyes wide open to see around the bend. Entering this metaphoric collision course is to enter the realm of possibilities powerfully engaged, of uncertainties not only embraced but explicitly invoked and of purposeful blends in poiesis and kinesis across multiple trajectories of performance studies.

I now borrow from David Hanley-Tejeda’s presentation an illustrative question involving an anecdote of Southern Illinois residents worried that their tornado insurance policy may not cover damage from a weather event labeled as an ‘inland hurricane’:

I find myself thinking about what metaphors might we not, as a community, be able to afford? [...] what do we need performance “to be or not to be” metaphorically because the insurance is good? Because we are “insured,” because the metaphor properly names what performance is or isn’t, or is enough, because it pays out, it has good coverage. [...] We should ask does the metaphor insure because it assures us of certain things about performance? So that it may afford us certain epistemological or ontological comforts?

In posing this question, Hanley-Tejeda hints at the possibility of risk, of safety compromised, of giving up certain comforts of certainty that we may not know we enjoy precisely because of the privileges that we exercise by using metaphors in performance studies. We may believe, for example, that we can afford the luxury of openness and freedom in performance studies, but Ronald Pelias hints that we should be willing to explore what else lurks within that opening:

Performance is an opening, a breach, a deconstruction of the discursive system, be it artistic, linguistic or social that offers possibilities. Some of the possibilities are available for reflection; some imply needed action. Some frighten, cause us to retreat. Some promise hope; some not. Some are right; some are wrong.

Della Pollock's collision course metaphor explicitly addresses this aspect of 'danger' in unflinching terms:

It reminds us of the danger of performance, a danger we have all too often limited to unpredictable outcomes or "soft" emergence but that may entail complete molecular meltdown and regeneration; conflict with forms of power that have the power to malign, dismiss, arrest, fire, annihilate; and the possibility that at the collision point of reactive agents may be a violation, even a violence catalyzed even (however deceptively, however apparently innocently) by claims to the common good or liberal intentions.

Pollock then resonates with one of the more enduring and inspiring metaphors in performance studies, that of Dwight Conquergood's nomadic 'caravans', to caution that even "a nomadic performance culture can still circle the wagons. The culture of the collision is more exposed, more dangerous, and potentially more productive."

Why am I so fixated on collisions and dangers? Here I must reveal my own markedly treacherous performances of belonging within the postmodern intersections of religions, ethnicities, and nationalities. I am now legally named hari stephen kumar as I become an American in New England, but I was born to Tamil and Malayalee parents in

South India as Hariharan Shivakumar, only to leave shortly afterward to live in Yemen during my childhood. Although I was raised as a secretive Hindu Brahmin in orthodox Islamic Yemen in the 1980s and the early 1990s, once I came to America I betrayed the orthodox Hinduism of my parents to become an over-zealous Christian convert shortly before 9/11. My name is itself a site of troubling performances that are open to interpellations, interpolations, and extrapolations. It marks me as a nomad wandering in-between collisions of multiple identities that perform betraying and belonging simultaneously, within and around my marked body. I choose the word ‘betray’ carefully and unromantically to mean the experiences of revealing a constellation of subjectivities that move in resistance outside the available categories in the colonizing desires of singular identification. In response to implicit either-or demands for identification as either safe friend or deceptive foe, as either proven patriot or potential traitor, such a splintered consciousness invokes troubling ambiguities of ‘both-and’ that neither assure confidences nor allay fears of being permanently located in binary poles. I perform both belonging and betraying in the collisions between global migration and local citizenship.

May Joseph (1999) describes ‘nomadic citizenship’ as a transnational condition experienced by many peoples who are continually in transit over many years, migrating uncertainly and sometimes in legal ambiguity, to produce a form of citizenship that

fractures coherent categories of belonging, offering instead the incomplete, ambivalent, and uneasy spaces of everyday life through which migrant communities must forge affiliations with majority constituencies. (p. 17)

I link the metaphors of Pollock and Pelias within Joseph’s formulation of how such experiences provide openings for significant collisions in nomadic contexts:

spaces between the politics of race and the history of migration [...] opened up by such multiply migrated communities bring into focus some of the incidental, though no less traumatic, collisions of displaced nationalisms [...] (Joseph, 1999, p. 71)

For such nomads, performance is treacherous citizenship—we risk exposure to be seen and identified, to be surveilled and to be counted, even to be counted upon, just as fervently as we strive to disappear into normalcy, to perform embodied norms even as our marked bodies desire and strive to challenge those same norms. Nomads, whether in literal or metaphoric caravans, whether performing in everyday life on the move or in illusory safety amidst encircled wagons, do not have ‘collision coverage’ and cannot afford the luxury of choosing among epistemological insurance policies. They cannot afford to be found, undocumented, at the scene of collisions against documented citizens who have unquestioned rights of belonging and privileged expectations of ‘free’ and ‘safe’ travels.

Performances of nomadic citizenship are deeply embodied invitations to experience and know a world of troubles: the troubles of the always-in-between wanderer without a permanent home address; the troubles of the cultural tacticians who have few reliable support positions and who must make do with even fewer stockpiles of their own cultural resources; the troubles of nomads in the middle of caravan journeys into the uncertain and the unknown only to find themselves confronted with apparatuses of state and institutional power that demand identifications and validated itineraries. Della Pollock and Ronald Pelias raise very important connections in the exploration of metaphor as a methodological tool for performance studies to engage with such nomadic lived experiences, even those within our own caravans. I urge that we continue their focus on metaphors that explicitly move performance studies toward the productive

exploration of uncertainties and collisions, of frightening breaches and unromantic deconstructions, of uneasy and discomfiting rejections of violently good intentions. For example, where I live and labor in New England I study peculiarly postmodern collisions between the metaphoric and the material in the openings that span postcolonial New England's liberally expressed claims of inclusivity and local performances of regional racisms entrenched in New England's colonial norms. In such post-globalized and post-9/11 communities, methodological metaphors in performance studies can help us see with other eyes, even eyes that surprise us with fractured views, because they can help connect our living bodies to the embodied metaphors of nomadic subjects wrestling with performances of identity and hybridity, of citizenship and resistance, and of belonging-and-betraying.

ACT VII
LETTERS FOR ELIANA

I'm going to tell you a story about
this one time when your uncle Cal and I
were driving from Amherst to Pittsfield.
This was about a year or two
before you were born
so your uncle Cal was probably
about 14 or 15 years old
and I was driving him back
home
to Pittsfield after he had visited
us in Amherst for a weekend.

Somehow the conversation turned toward
where I was from.
And when I said that I considered myself
to be "from Amherst"
your uncle Cal asked, quite innocently
where I was born.

He couldn't really have known
how that question made me feel
and it was a perfectly good question

because am I not from

where I was born?

So we talked about

where your mother was born

Pasadena, Texas

and where your uncle Eric was born

Springfield, Illinois

and how both of them are now from

Pittsfield, Massachusetts

because that's where they grew up.

When your uncle Cal asked me
where I was born
and where I grew up
why did I say I am now from
For me, the question isn't am I from
or am I from
but rather, why can't I be from
I might have said to your uncle
that Amherst is
home
for me, now.

A year or two later
and we are in a hospital room
and I am so delighted that you
can say you were born in
but just a few days afterward
we cross the Connecticut River
taking you in your first car ride
to our tiny apartment in
an apartment we have lived in for
only two short weeks before you arrived.

A year or two later
and we are already talking about
moving yet again out of
our tiny 500 square feet
which aren't big enough for
your tiny feet
as you begin walking and running around.

Trichur, Kerala, India
Taiz, Yemen
Amherst, Massachusetts?
India?
Yemen?
Massachusetts?

Image 1



Northampton, Massachusetts

Amherst, Massachusetts

We wonder if we can afford	
to move, even within Amherst	
but we know we will definitely	
have to move when I finish	
graduate school and look for a job	somewhere
quite likely not in	Amherst
maybe not even in	Massachusetts
maybe even out of	New England
hopefully still within	America
but possibly	anywhere.

A wonderful person whose name is Soyini
 (I hope you get to meet her someday)
 says that “perhaps geography is destiny after all”
 and by this she means that
 when an African-American woman with dark skin
 is in Ghana, Africa, she is still seen as
abruni, foreigner, white person
 i.e. “the white girl upstairs.”
 So although I worry about
 where you will grow up
 maybe I shouldn’t worry about
 how you will choose to answer
 where you are from

because your	because your
geography is	destiny is
always and	always and
already linked with	already linked with
questions of	questions of
destiny.	geography.

Image 2a



Here is a picture of you
with your mother
whom I love dearly
this is one of my favorite pictures
you are both smiling
and maybe this picture shows how
you and your mother
might look like
when she takes you shopping
or for walks
just the two of you
together.

Your mother sometimes tells me
about conversations that she has
with people she encounters
people who are curious
about the difference
in skin color between
you and your mother
when they see
just the two of you
together.

Image 2b



Here is a picture of me
holding you and smiling
actually I don't think we
have any picture where I
am holding you and not smiling
I grin widely whenever you
are in my arms
and maybe this picture shows how
you and I might look like
when we go outside
just the two of us
together.

I remember holding you in my arms
one clear crisp September morning in 2010
you are about 10 months old and
we are standing at the entrance to
our little apartment complex and
you are smiling and waving at the
cars passing by and the people
in the cars are smiling and waving at
just the two of us
together.

About the guy who asks
quite innocently
whether it is natural for you
to have darker skin than your mother.
He is quite worried, apparently
until your mother explains
that it is because
your father has dark skin—
something that, apparently
never occurs to the guy
as a reasonable explanation
for why a white woman might
be a brown baby's natural mother
in Amherst, Massachusetts.

About the woman who asks
quite innocently
“is she yours?”
And the next woman who asks
the same question
and the next woman also
who are quite curious, apparently
until your mother explains
that you are indeed hers
naturally through birth—
something that, apparently
never occurs to the women
for why a white woman might
be a brown baby's natural mother
in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Earlier that morning I watched
a CNN interview of a guy
from Texas, a member of the
U.S. House of Representatives who claims
that there are Middle Eastern women
coming to the US to have babies
and he says they take the babies back
home
to the Middle East where (he says) they
raise them to be terrorists
who have US passports, and he
doesn't have any proof
but he calls them
“terror babies.”

And there is a woman in the CNN video
from Texas, a Texas State Representative
who says she loves babies but she thinks
American-born babies with foreign parents
should not get automatic citizenship
because she is worried
about “these little terrorists.”
I remember the summer of 2010 as
a summer when our elected representatives
seem to represent the fears and angers
of white Americans more than the hopes of
brown Americans and I am worrying about
being a brown and bearded father trying
to become a naturalized American
colonized in postcolonial New England.

Your mother and I laugh when
she comes
home
and tells me these stories
but then we wonder
why nobody questions
whether your mother is from “here”
and why their questions are instead about
whether your father is from someplace
a little farther
and we wonder if perhaps our
geography is destiny
after all.

A chill runs down my spine
as I hold you in my arms
by the roadside with the cars purring by
and I worry that people see
a brown and bearded man
and his brown baby outside
an apartment complex filled with foreigners
and their American-born babies
and I clutch you a little tighter
a little closer
and I wonder if perhaps our
destiny is geography
after all.

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